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The New York Review of Science Fiction

www.nyrsf.com

March 2004
Number 187
Vol. 16, No. 7: \$4.00

David Ketterer

Questions and Answers: The Life and Work of John Wyndham

Introduction

In the early 1960s Sam Moskowitz, the American historian of science fiction, busied himself with writing biographical "profiles" for *Amazing Stories* of a number of sf writers. (An earlier group was collected and published under the title *Explorers of the Infinite* in 1963 while the follow-up collection of the "moderns" entitled *Seekers of Tomorrow* appeared in 1966.) His approach involved sending each of the writers he chose a detailed list of biographical questions. Had he not done this, much of the history of sf in the twentieth century would have been lost. For our knowledge of the history of British sf, we have to be very grateful that Moskowitz picked "John Wyndham," henceforth JBH (for John Beynon Harris, the name he used in real life, a part of the very full name John Wyndham Parkes Lucas Beynon Harris) as one of his moderns. The answers JBH provided to 29 of Moskowitz's 30 questions add up to the most extended account he ever gave of his own life. He did not like talking about his personal history and would have preferred that no photographs of him be published.

Near the beginning of my researches into the works and rather mysterious life of JBH, I wrote to Sam Moskowitz asking for any help he might be able to provide. In response to my plea, Moskowitz mailed me a photocopy of his questionnaire and a photocopy of JBH's replies, included with a short letter dated 22 January 1964. The result is an exchange which, together with my transcription of handwritten memoir material left by JBH's brother Vivian Beynon Harris (published in *Foundation* in 1999), constitutes almost everything that can now be known about JBH's life.

In the pre-question-list preamble to his 12 January 1964 letter to JBH, Sam explains, with some humor, that:

In the group of "moderns" I have already done nearly 20 5,000 word biographical criticisms of authors as well known as Heinlein, Bradbury, van Vogt, Asimov, Sturgeon, Simak, etc. Next on my list is John Beynon Harris/John Beynon/John Wyndham to name but three.

Moskowitz, of course, is alluding to the variety of pen-names that JBH used, all combinations of his real full name. He assures JBH "that all information related will be utilized with good taste." For some of the wars, I refer the reader to Vivian's memoirs of his brother and some of my notes to same.

JBH addresses his 22 January letter to "My dear, indefatigable Sam" and explains that:

The amount of homework indicated by the questions alone awes me. . . . the least I can do is to respond as helpfully as I can. (But when you say "moderns" and include me, you'll be getting yourself into trouble. I rather gather that I am not only "old hat" (I don't know the U.S. equivalent for that) but a kind of renegade, in the manner, though without the distinction of, Ray Bradbury.

Special Past Masters Issue

Two on John Wyndham by David Ketterer
Two Views of Heinlein's Last and First Novel

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Plus an editorial!

Two Views: For Us, the Living by Robert A. Heinlein

New York: Scribner's, 2004; \$25.00 hc; 260 pages

I. Reviewed by F. Paul Wilson

I'm sitting alone in the House of Blues on Sunset—it's an easy walk from my hotel, and I don't want to brave the Friday LA night traffic—with a Sapphire gimlet (straight up), a Cajun sorfin (medium rare), and Robert A. Heinlein's *For Us, the Living* before me. I'm on the fourth chapter and having the damndest time making sense of it. It's not the gimlet (I've had only two sips), it's the book. What the hell is going on? Until today I'd have considered the phrase "unreadable Heinlein" an oxymoron. (Okay, his last couple of novels were tough sledding in parts, but they were a walk in the park compared to this.) Now I'm not so sure.

I wanted to like this book, wanted to love it. But reading it, I'm sad to say, is a bloody awful chore.

I don't say that lightly, especially since the book is dedicated to me. (Well, the dedication page says, for *Heinlein's Children*, and I count myself in that number.) I never knew Robert A. Heinlein personally, so I have no opinion of him as a man, but I'm intimate with his work: I grew up reading his juveniles, then graduated to his more adult fare. I guffawed before his oeuvre. If not for him I doubt I would have written science fiction. And when I did start writing, I made my first sale to John W. Campbell, just as he did. I feel *connected* to this man.

With those bona fides, I believe I have the right to tell you that *For Us, the Living* should not have been published. Heinlein did not want it published. Near the end of his life, he and his wife destroyed what they thought were the last existing copies. I see only one way to interpret that: The author did not want that manuscript made public. And with good reason. It's more a series of Socratic dialogues—including multipage monologues—than a novel. It even has an appendix and footnotes and some with algebraic equations.

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The New York Review of Science Fiction

ISSUE #187 March 2004
Volume 16, No. 7 ISSN #1052-9438

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Special thanks to: Moshe Feder, Avram Grumer, Joshua Kronengold, Keith Mutzman,

Lisa Padol, Christine Quiñones, and Vicki Rosenzweig.

Published monthly by Dragon Press, P.O. Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570.

\$4.00 per copy. Annual subscriptions: U. S. Bulk Rate, \$36.00; Canada, \$38.00; U. S. First Class, \$42.00

Overseas Air Printed Matter, UK & Europe, \$47.00; Asia & Australia, \$49.00. Domestic institutional subscriptions \$40.00.

Please make checks payable to Dragon Press, and payable in U.S. funds.

Send all editorial inquiries and submissions to <cdgh@tor.com> and <kjm@panix.com>.

An up-to-date index of back issues in Excel format is available, e-mail <nysrf@comcast.net> to request one.

New York Review of Science Fiction Home Page: www.nysrf.com

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Two Views: For Us, the Living

continued from page 1
approaching *For Us, the Living*.

Let's go back to the beginning—in more ways than one. Heinlein always told us that he wrote his first piece of fiction, "Lifeline," in 1939 and sold it to *Astounding* on his first try.

Not wholly true. "Lifeline" was not his first stab at fiction. A year or so earlier he'd written a novel-length book called *For Us, the Living* (hereafter: *FUTL*). This "Comedy of Customs" (the handwritten subtitle Heinlein added to the first page of the manuscript) concerns a naval pilot named Perry Nelson who is killed in a 1939 car accident and wakes up a century and a half later wandering around in another body. A beautiful nude dancer named Diana takes Perry in and begins teaching him about the world of 2086. They fall in love, but when one of Diana's old beaus comes around, Perry gets jealous and cold-cocks him. This is unacceptable behavior in 2086, so Perry has to choose between banishment to Coventry and deprogramming/reprogramming. He chooses the latter and eventually regains Diana's heart. Along the way he has an affair with a woman named Olga and becomes fascinated with rockenships. The book closes with Perry entering a ship for a twenty-four-hour circumlar night.

That's pretty much the whole plot: Boy meets girl, boy almost loses girl, boy gets girl back in a *ménage à trois*, and boy rockets off to the moon.

All the rest is talk-talk-talk.

Which is the apparent reason Heinlein wrote *FUTL*—to lecture the world of 1939 on the errors of its ways, and how it could evolve into the utopia he describes if only it will heed him.

The clear, effortless Heinlein prose is there—no doubt about that, the man was a natural—but the style is a long, long way from "The God Iried open." They're still saying "Oh, bother" in 2086, and everything from stoves to TVs is too often described in excessive detail (five and a half pages on the gizmos in a flying car), as if their façades are as important as their function.

As for his characters, they exist simply to ask and answer questions. Perry is a supposedly generic pale male from the 1930s who, within hours after being taken in, is lounging around nude with a beautiful and equally nude woman. Is he aroused? Not so anyone could tell. Is Heinlein kidding? Not so anyone could tell. And Perry's jealous rage at Diana's old lover is out of character with whatever we've been able to gather about him: It's merdy a vehicle to slip him into the legal and medical systems of 2086. (The deprogramming/reprogramming, by the way, is laughable.)

Throughout the book Diana arranges for a series of experts to lecture Perry (and thereby the reader) on how the utopia of 2086 came to be. Much of this future history—nor *the Future History*—is fascinating. The new US Constitution and especially its Twenty-Seventh Amendment (the war referendum amendment wherein only people eligible for military service may vote as to whether or not the country should go to war) are intriguing, but the economics Q&A sessions are snoozers. Worse, they're *name* snoozers. The banking system, even in 1939, was far too complex for the fixes Heinlein proposes. But every once in a while your drooping lids are popped open with a passage like the following, in which Perry is talking to an economist named Davis.

Perry: "Everything may look rosy right now, but I believe that I see the seeds of decay in this system. Doesn't it encourage the reproduction of the unfit in unlimited numbers? Wasn't Malthus right in the long run? Aren't you steadily wakening the race by making life too easy?"

Davis: "I don't believe so. I think your fears are groundless. The pathologically unfit are inhibited from breeding by a combination of special economic inducements and the mild coercion of the threat of Coventry."

Heinlein tries to dress it up throughout the rest of the passage, but no matter how you spin it, he's talking about state-sanctioned eugenics, a notion that had a lot of popular support (Edgar Rice Burroughs was a notable advocate) in the 1930s.

The international stance of the US in 2086 is unwaveringly isolationist, and domestic policies are an odd mix: libertarian in the "private sphere," and authoritarian and utilitarian in the "public sphere."

Heinlein proposes a benign Big Brother government that controls the banking system and doles out a monthly welfare check to every citizen.

But if you gird your loins and wade through the monologues, you'll wonder how he predicted FDR's third term and the EU, and be chilled by his description of an attack on the US in 2003 that leveled Manhattan. You'll also find yourself nodding and grinning as you recognize the social, sexual, political, and technological underpinnings of many of his subsequent stories. The free love, the feminism, the sense of duty and loyalty are all there. Many of the roots of Heinlein's *Future History* are tucked away in *FUTL*. You'll recognize bits and ideas that led to everything from "The Roads Must Roll" and "The Man Who Sold the Moon" to *Beyond This Horizon* and *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

Does that mean you should run out and buy it? Probably not. If you're someone who has read a fair amount of Heinlein, you won't find much new here—at least not much you will like. If you're someone who harbors fond memories and good feelings about his work, this won't enhance them; it may even tarnish them. And if you've never read Heinlein, please, please, please do not start here.

In his introduction, Spider Robinson does a heroic job of looking on the bright side and subtly coaching you that what you're about to read isn't really as bad as you'll think it is. The afterword by Robert James is fascinating, giving us a look at 1930s politics and the events in Heinlein's life that influenced the utopia of *FUTL*. Easily the best part of the book.

But all this is moot. I say again: A deceased author's wishes concerning his unpublished work should be respected. Destroying all the known copies of a manuscript makes Heinlein's intent unmistakably clear: He did not want *FUTL* to see the light of day. To go against those wishes is an affront to his right to privacy. To dig up a copy and publish it is literary graverobbing. What the hell was the Heinlein estate thinking?

Perhaps I'm overly sensitive about the issue. I have my reasons. My own first novel, *The Accidental Patriot*, was a book-length political diatribe, a near-future libertarian manifesto. A book not unlike *For Us, the Living*. And like *FUTL*, no one wanted it. I was sure the only reason the publishers were rejecting it was because of its radical political content. Years later I found the manuscript in a box in my cellar. A quick browse of a few chapters and the real reason for its universal rejection was obvious: The damn thing was unreadable. While trudging through *FUTL*, I had a frisson, not from the text, but from thought of someone publishing *The Accidental Patriot* after my death. I know that the only existing copy was consigned to the flames—literally—many years ago, but the thought still caused a shudder.

Maybe you could make a case for a small printing by a university press as a reference for academics and Heinlein completists—this is, after all, the unborn fetus of his *Future History*—but for Scribner's to publish it as a major release... inexcusable. That's thumbing your nose at a dead author's dying wish.

Robert A. Heinlein did not want you to read this book. If you honor the man, honor his wish. ►

F. Paul Wilson lives in Wall, New Jersey.

II. Reviewed by John Clute

Road RAH

Everything about this novel is interesting, even the experience of reading it. *For Us, the Living: A Comedy of Customs* was written in 1938–1939; it is Robert A. Heinlein's first extended piece of fiction, and was never published because in 1939 it was not simply unsold: It was probably unpublishable. Over the twentieth century, didactic novels of a utopian bent have been increasingly perceived as unmarketable—dysopias like Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) or Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) do very much better—but more specifically, *For Us, the Living* promulgates the kind of arguments about sex, religion, politics and economics that normally gain publication through fringe presses, not the trade publishers Heinlein submitted his manuscript to, Random House and Macmillan (which did, all the same, publish B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two* in 1948).

For us, though, in 2004, *For Us, the Living*, as far as its arguments go, is pure Heinlein; indeed, because almost every radical notion he

ever generated appears here in *stern*, the book rewrites our sense of Heinlein's entire career; and because Heinlein's career, as we understood it, has always seemed expressive of the nature of American sf from 1939 to 1966, this small, slightly stumblebum first novel rewrites our understanding of those years, especially the early ones, when John W. Campbell, Jr. was attempting to shape the nascent genre into a weapon of future-purification.

It has certainly been well known that Heinlein (unlike the younger Isaac Asimov) found Campbell's personality and *Diktator* less than persuasive, but the degree to which he corralled his imaginative intellect, in order to help create the sf that missed the boat, has never I think, really been guessed. In a nutshell, the ideas about sex and privacy and government that inch into view—just a little pruned, perhaps—through the finger-wagging pages of *For Us, the Living* are exactly the ideas that the professional writer Heinlein only let himself begin to utter again in 1969, with *Starship Troopers*. I'm not about to suggest that if Heinlein had been able to publish openly in the pages of *Outstanding* in 1939, sf would have gotten the future right; I would suggest, however, that if Heinlein, and his colleagues, had been able to publish adult sf in *Outstanding* and its fellow journals, then sf might not have done such a grotesquely poor job of prefiguring something of the flavor of actually living here at the onset of 2004.

Watching the Competent Man Being Born

A short notice of this text cannot begin to articulate the minutiae of similarity and difference between early Heinlein and late. Central to both periods is the concept of the absolute privacy of the individual citizen of America. As the new Constitution of 2028 states:

Every citizen is free to perform any act which does not hamper the equal freedom of another. No law shall forbid the performance of any act, which does not damage the physical or economic welfare of any other person. No act shall constitute a violation of a law valid under this provision unless there is such damage, or immediate present danger of such damage resulting from that act.

This is a radical doctrine, as Heinlein clearly argues, for it means

the end of the blue laws, and a grisly unconscious symbiosis between the underworld and the organized churches—for the greatest bulwark of the underworld were always the moral creeds of the churches.

And so forth. These two quotes, which appear 200 pages apart in the text, are, as one might put it, just like Heinlein. The consequences, direct and cognate, which *For Us, the Living* doesn't really go very far to dramatize, run from the absolute and genuine separation of church and state, to the liberation of women, to very widespread private nudity, and to what we call, in this world, "open marriage."

The story through which these arguments are put—they include long lessons in Social Credit—begins typically. A young man named Perry from 1939 is, more or less magically, transported to 2087, where he learns about the brave new world which has evolved. He is necessarily as stupid as most of his fellow visitors to utopia—else there would be no reason to tell him everything down to the last detail—but gradually changes into a Competent Man, piloting the first spaceship around the moon in a slingshot ending, though before he gets Competent he has to spend a while in a psychological rehabilitation unit after hissing the nude male friend of his new nude lover Diana because he has failed to grasp the implications of privacy as applied to sexual freedom. The language in which this is all laid down (the word "breasts" never appears, though "breast"—designating a vague frontal region—shows up lots) is perhaps the most poignant residue of the chaparral writers had to grapple with just a few decades ago.

Robert James's afterword to *For Us, the Living*, which is far more useful than Spider Robinson's rather unfortunate introduction, provides some personal background. Heinlein's then-wife, Leslyn (they were married in 1932 and divorced in 1948), was a political radical (Heinlein's enthusiasm for Social Credit and Upton Sinclair comes clearer), an advocate of nudism (which they practiced with Theodore Sturgeon and others), and a proponent of open marriage (which they practiced). As the biographical note on page 261 indicates, she clearly

"inspired many of his female characters." (That Spider Robinson gives Heinlein's third wife, Virginia, entire credit as muse for his early work, and does not mention Leslyn at all, is one of the several oddities of his introduction.) When *For Us, the Living* failed to sell, Heinlein sat down and wrote "Lifeline," which sold immediately to Campbell, beginning the career he only really escaped from in 1959.

The Heinlein That Might Have Been

Robinson imagines Heinlein having an epiphany at this point, through the realization that he was a storyteller, an sf storyteller:

In the terminology of Roger Zelazny's *Lord of Light*, he took on his Aspect, and missed up his Attribute, and was born a god. In that moment, he ceased being Bob Heinlein, shipwrecked sailor and unemployed engineer, and became RAH, the Dean of Modern Science Fiction—the Man Who Sold the Moon—Lazarus Long, who cannot die.

I myself prefer to imagine that some sort of *consolatory* sense of empowerment may have braced the young Heinlein in 1939, a realization that—even in a market dominated by the redneck blauesque Campbell—he could tell and sell Story. Which is enough. The rest is loss. The rest is the knowledge (it may be) that he could not populate his Future History with real people, that the Future History he was about to create would be a cartoon. That instead of being a great writer to the world, he had a chance of becoming RAH to the gang.

There are a few more dull moments in Spider Robinson's boyish intro. Here is the first paragraph in its entirety:

Most authorities [including the knowledgeable Dr. James, who discovered the manuscript of *For Us, the Living*] are calling this book Robert A. Heinlein's first novel. I avoid arguing with authorities—it's usually simpler to shoot them—but I think it is something far more important than that, myself, and infinitely more interesting.

We can perhaps put to one side the unfortunate echo here of a famous response by Hermann Goering to questions of culture, as Spider Robinson does repudiate his impulse to shoot authorities in the following paragraph; and we can perhaps pass over the moment, a couple of sentences further down, where he informs us that *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899), published one year after *The War of the Worlds*, comes from "the last stage" of H. G. Wells's career, after he had given up trying to do Story (a judgment which is itself a nonsense). But no. We can't really let this go, because it is in fact relevant (it is, to begin with, the sort of thing an "authority" might not have bugged up). It is also relevant, now that Robinson's confusions have been purged, to remember that, at the end of the nineteenth century, Wells could assume that the readers of his earlier Scientific Romances would have no difficulty assimilating, in *When the Sleeper Wakes*, a utopian discourse woven into Story.

In 1939, Heinlein found that the world had changed (certainly the utopia, as a literary form, had become nearly extinct); and in 2004, the Futurama simplicities of life in a utopian novel seem even less usable. So *For Us, the Living* does not work as a utopia, because the formalities of utopia no longer make us feel urgent. The point of *For Us, the Living*, in the year of its publication, is something rather different, as Robinson, when he settles down to work, does make clear: With its privacy anthems, its sex, its nudity, its rolling roads, its Coventry, its lust for space, it is everything Heinlein later made become. It is also, sadly, something else. It is the road not dreamed, a rage of making not made. (RAH's famous asperba about his ostensible peers surely comes, in part, from his knowledge, throughout the 1940s, that he could have done so much better; and the bullying solipsistic disappointments of his late work might be explained by the fact that he had had to bottle himself up so long, and that by 1960 or so the world had lost him.)

He missed the train. So did we. He was the train we did not catch. ▶

John Clute lives in London, England. This review originally appeared as the 19 December 2003 installment of his column "Excessive Candour" from SciFi Weekly (#349) at www.scifi.com.

The Life of John Wyndham

continued from page 1

JBH was born in 1903 and, in many ways, he remained an Edwardian brought up by Victorians.

In the following questionnaire, questions marked with an asterisk contain substantial information not used by Moskowitz in his profiles.

Questions and Answers

1. Date, place of birth.

10th July 1903, in the village of Knowle, Warwickshire.

(This was not only a long time ago, but in something that seems like a different world.)

[JBH's birth certificate names "Dorridge, Knowle," to the south-east of Birmingham, as his place of birth but provides no further information; Dorridge adjoins Knowle. The lack of house name or number is a foreshadowing of the fact that from, age eight to sixty, JBH would have no home that he could truly call his own. Were his parents, George Beynon Harris (then a solicitor) and Gertrude [Parkes] Harris staying in the house of a relative in Dorridge while his first Birmingham home, 37 Fountain Road was being built at the expense of Gertrude's father, the ironmaster John Israel Parkes? The Harris family lived at Brynfield (as the Fountain Road home was known) from 1903 or 1904 until 1908. Evidence indicates that a house named Avon Lodge on Arden Road in Dorridge, which was owned by a probable member of the Parkes family, was JBH's fittingly named birthplace.]

2. Full name of your father, maiden name of your mother, religious persuasion if you do not feel it too personal, and vocation of your father.

Father: George Beynon Harris—Barrister at Law. Member of Gray's Inn. (In case you are unfamiliar with our particular legal system, a barrister belongs to that branch of the profession that pleads in the higher courts—a solicitor does not.) He was a Welshman—though he might dispute that, claiming as he did that he came of a pocket of English somehow cut off by the wild Welsh some centuries ago, and consenting to internecine with them only reluctantly when centuries of inbreeding seemed to make it advisable.

Mother: Gertrude Parkes: a daughter of one of the last generation of independent ironmasters who flourished in Victorian Birmingham—strong Methodist type, he was. Morning prayers in the dining room as was proper.

Religion: I understand that once baptized one cannot cease to be a member of the Church of England, but only backslide, so I suppose I must be C of E. In fact, I was confirmed in it under pressure of schoolmasters at age of 14. Went to first Communion the following Sunday. Was so shocked and nauseated that I have never been since. Don't on the whole, like religions. Power tends to corrupt them. Have a suspicion that they may be the Achilles' heel of humanity.

[Gertrude persuaded her husband to qualify (in 1905) as a barrister, and so cease being a lowly solicitor. George Harris first practiced as a solicitor in Cardiff in the mid-1880s. He was a barrister-at-law at 77 Colmore Row in Birmingham from 1905 to 1909. He published *The Law of Tenders* (London: Butterworth & Co.) in 1908 under the name "George Lucas Beynon."

He had added the "Lucas" to his name because, something of a social climber, he believed his family was distantly related to Sir Charles Lucas (1633–93), the royalist leader during the Civil War.]

3. Have you any brothers and sisters? Names and ages relative to yourself.

One brother, Vivian, 2 years younger. No sisters. He went to the RADA (Royal Academy of Dramatic Art) after leaving school, and was on the stage for some time. He lives now in Kent.

[Vivian (1905–87) had moved to Hythe in Kent in the later 1950s. He lived, directly facing the sea, in the ground floor flat (1

"Sandown") of an odd bunker-shaped building on Marine Parade, Hythe. His long-time companion Lila Gann (stage name: Lila Grettan) lived above at 2 "Sandown." Vivian, like his brother, and like their father, was also a writer. Before JBH's success with *The Day of the Triffids*, Vivian published a burst of four light, humorous novels (the second two being romances): *Trouble at Harard* (1948), *Confession at Campden Trips* (1948, a second Richard Harard novel), *One Thing Constant* (1949), and *Song for a Siren* (1951). Vivian continued writing fiction (including an effective sf novel about a visitor from another planet entitled *Son of the Morning*) for the rest of his life without succeeding in publishing any of it.]

4. Town or towns where you were raised. Nature of your schooling.

After my mother and father parted in 1911 I had no settled home (except briefly in Birmingham) and consequently spent my school holidays in whatever part of England my mother was fancying at the moment.

Schooling: I attended 7 in all. Loathed Nos. 4 & 6, tolerated No 5, enjoyed No 7 very much (age 15–18.)

[Vivian insisted in his 14 April 1972 biographical notes for Angel-Louis Pujante, the Spanish graduate student who wrote M.A. and Ph.D. theses on Wyndham (1972 and 1980) that his brother attended only five schools not seven—two day schools and three boarding schools. The two he detested were Edgbaston High School for Boys (1914–15), where he was bullied, and the boarding school Blundell's (January to March 1918); the one he tolerated was the boarding school Shardlow Hall in Shardlow, Derbyshire (1915–17); and the one he loved was the very progressive, co-educational boarding school Bodleas (1918–21). Pre-1913, JBH attended Miss [Mabel] Woodward's Private School in Edgbaston, Birmingham, which may have had two different addresses. It was only at the 16 Harborne Road address for the 1907–11 period; perhaps during the 1911–14 period JBH attended the same school at a different location. That and an unknown kindergarten could explain the difference between JBH's seven schools and Vivian's five.]

5. As a young boy, what was your relationship with your parents? With your brothers or sisters? With other children?

It is a wise defense to pretend an interest in the interests of the majority. Having learnt this fact painfully by the age of 11, I managed to get by all right with only occasional lapses into statements of honest opinion. (This process is now known, I believe, as social integration. I don't think it had a name then.)

My brother and I got along excellently, and still do—though he continues to be disappointed by the kind of stuff I write.

6. Would you regard your childhood as a pleasant one in retrospect or unpleasant and reasons.

Childhood is for everyone, I suspect, happier in recollection than in reality—and youth, too, for the matter of that. Actually it is continual lesson-time, and many of them are painfully learnt—and yet, unless one sets out deliberately to recall the miseries, humiliations, and frustrations, it is the pleasant recollections that usually dominate. But to a newcomer to a strange world everything matters too much. I should have to have to go through it again. Yet, as I recall it, I was as happy as most, and a lot more so than some.

[Miseries, humiliations: JBH is alluding to being bullied at age 11 while he was at Edgbaston High School for Boys, as described in his unpublished autobiographical story "Lesson."]

7. As a teenager did you attend any institution of higher learning? If so, what did you major in and did you have any special interests during this period?

No, I left school at 18. Thereafter [sic.]

8. Have you followed any other professions other than writing since leaving school? If so, could you briefly outline them and the time period.

[Thereafter] was a farm pupil for a couple of years and didn't seem very promising. Then my mother thought that a profession would be more secure and respectable. She suggested accountancy: I said no. My father suggested that the church could offer a good life, with hunting two or three times a week. It didn't seem a good idea, either. Having no positive inclination I compromised on law, and went to a tutor in Oxford to mug up for exams I had neglected to take. That I did not pass the first one was entirely my own fault; I somehow formed a habit of rushing through the papers and then adjoining to the Science Museum which was just next door. (In fact, come to think of it, I never did pass any public exam later than Common Entrance to Public Schools which I took at fourteen and did quite well in.) After that I tried advertising for a but; found it both dead-end and deadly. At intervals all along I had been doing an occasional story which nobody took. Trouble probably was I had just enough allowance to live on—one could live pretty cheaply in London in those days. Now I tried more seriously, and got one or two short ones taken—short[er]—shorts in daily or evening papers.

[Science museum: JBH is referring to the Museum of the History of Science (one of four Oxford University museums), located in the Old Ashmolean Building, Broad Street. His knowledge of the law, derived no doubt partly from his father, informed both his detective novels and his logical, deductive SF. The law figures directly in "Brief to Counsel," *Argo* 20 (February 1959): 28–30.]

JBH took the Common Entrance Examination in order to be accepted as a pupil at Shardlow Hall.

Not much detailed information has survived about the 1921 (post Bedales)—1925 (pre short stories) period of JBH's life. He elaborates a bit in a one-page autobiographical typescript enclosed with a 22 June 1938 letter to T. Stanhope Sprigg, editor of the short lived magazine *Fantasy*.

After school tried farming and learned something about sheep. Started to read law, and learned a little more about sheep. Gave that up for advertising, and learned a great deal about sheep.

The one or two short stories published in 1925 (and/or possibly in 1926), probably under the name John B. Harris, have yet to be identified. He seems to have passed one or both of them on to his American literary agent Forrest Ackerman in the late 1940s. In a 30 March 1952 letter to his subsequent American agent Frederik Pohl, he notes with annoyance that

now I learn that that fathead Forry has dug up a stupid thing I did in my youth, about 1925, and without enquiry or authorization sent it to [J. Francis] McComas [the joint editor with Anthony Boucher of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* from its inception in 1949 until 1954]. The violent blast of Catholic wrath with which it was returned to him suggests that he has quered me with *FS&SF* for a long time, if not altogether.

Edward L. Ferman, the editor of *FS&SF* from 1966 to 1991, told me that no records remain of the titles of rejected stories during the 1950s. I spoke to Ackerman on the phone on 9 February 2003. No longer resident in the Ackermans, he does not have ready access to his archive (where the 1925 JBH story or stories may survive) and cannot now recall the title of the story he submitted.

JBH seems never to have acknowledged in writing or print a work written around the same time as, or shortly after, his 1925 or 1926 short-stories, his first published novel (attributable on the basis of internal evidence): the paperback *The Curse of the Burdens*, by John B. Harris, Aldine Mystery Novels No. 17 (London: The Aldine Publishing Company, Ltd., 1927?).]

9. Do you remember the first science fiction magazine you ever purchased? Had you done any special reading in the field before this? *

I didn't buy the first s.f. magazine I read. I found it, a copy

of *Amazing*, lying about in a hotel lounge. As a result I did buy some other numbers—we could get them for 3d. each then; I understand they came over as ballast in ships. After reading a few of them (and winning a competition set up by *Air Wonder Stories* for a descriptive sub-captain with the not very brilliant phrase "Future Flying Fiction"—\$100, but I had to prize it out of them because AWS folded before they used it) I thought hang it, it shouldn't be difficult to do this stuff better than some of them do. So [I] tried.

"Special reading in the field before this?" Well, that's a bit difficult. *Amazing* was about the beginning of the field. Verne, I suppose was pretty close to the field. I'd read the better known ones of his without much enthusiasm: surely they must have been a lot better in the original French than they were in translation. Some of Doyle was borderline, and I'd read those, too.

Wells I read with devotion—but then he was not 'in the field' at all: he put story and characterisation first, 'the field' cared for nothing but gadgetry and novelty, and to a great extent still does.

[It may be inferred from JBH's essay, "Sowing New Thoughts," *Tales of Wonder*, no. 7 (Summer 1939), 124–25, that he read that first issue of *Amazing Stories* in 1929: "It is now [1939] eight years since my first attempt at science fiction was published ["Words to Barter" in 1931]; and it was a couple of years before that I encountered my first sample of science fiction, as it was then appearing in America—an old magazine which someone had left about in a lounge" (124). This was probably at the Penn Club, the residential hotel in Bloomsbury, London, where he lived for over thirty years. He goes on the say that he had discovered Wells and read *The Time Machine* "at the age of twelve," i.e., in 1915 or 1916 when he was at Shardlow Hall.

The contest was announced in the February 1930 issue of *Air Wonder Stories*. JBH's winning slogan was announced (with three runners up) in boxed form in *Wonder Stories* 2, no. 4 (September 1930). JBH was aged 27 at the time. Because *Air Wonder Stories* had been merged into *Wonder Stories* which already had a slogan ("The Magazine of Future Fiction"), JBH's slogan was never used.]

10. When did you first begin writing, even unsuccessfully, and what type of story did you write?

First story—couldn't really say, but I remember a long and ambitious work concocted at the age of 13. That was during the Kaiser's war. It introduced nearly every weapon then current, but I can't recall much of it except that the hero achieved the destruction of a Zeppelin by running along the top and slashing one gas compartment after another with his bayonet as he went. Later on, when I first tried to get stories published (and didn't) they were mostly uncanny or ghosly. (When I did get any encouragement the loony editors of the period always said: 'But of course it needs a rational explanation at the end.' I still don't understand how their minds worked, but anyway the stories were very poor.) I rarely wrote straight stories—always seemed to get along better if I had a peg of the fantastic or the curious to hang them on.

11. When did you try your first science fiction story and which one was it?

The first story I deliberately aimed at a s-f magazine was called "The Refugee." *Wonder* took it, and published it as "Words to Barter" in May 1931.

["Words to Barter" is one of eight known 1927–40 published or unpublished titles by "John B. Harris." "The Refugee" is the title of the first of its five sections.]

12. Have you ever married, if so when and to whom? Have you any children?

Yes. Rather surprisingly. Last July; for the first time, too. Less surprisingly, no children. Wife was Grace Isobel Wilson, who celebrated her retirement from teaching English to the young in this way.

[JBH and Grace married on 26 July 1963 at the Russell Square

Registrar's Office in London shortly after his 60th birthday on 10 July and exactly a month before hers, JBH does not mention that he had first met Grace in 1931 when she became a fellow resident of the Penn Club and that he had had a "relationship" with her since 15 May 1935. She suggested titles for some of JBH's stories (e.g., "The Long Spoon") and contributed in other ways. For example, in a 17 March 1971 letter to Angel-Louis Pujante, she claims that "I had a hand in 'Consider Her Ways.'" JBH's feminist credentials rest in part on this story.]

13. Can you remember the origin of the idea [for] "The Lost Machine" and how this story happened to end up in *Amazing Stories* when all your other efforts were appearing in *Wonder Stories*?

I don't remember the origin of "The Lost Machine." I rather think I thought it would make a nice change from the hostile disposition of the robots of the period—well, come to think of it, of most periods. (Though it retained the standard scientist-and-daughter—too much of a change might have been a shock to the readers.) I fancy the idea of sending it to *Amazing* was not to have all one's eggs in the same basket.

"The Lost Machine" appeared in *Amazing Stories*, April 1932, 40–47.]

14. I would also be interested in the genesis of the following early stories: "The Venus Adventure," "Wanderers of Time," "Exiles on Asperus" and "The Man From Beyond." These were all highly unusual and advanced stories for the period in which they were published.

I seldom can recall genres. I think small, unnoticed seeds must fall, and not attract my attention until they have grown a bit. Regarding the three stories you mention, I can tell you this: "Venus Adventure" was rejected by *Wonder*, then by *Amazing* in November 1931; "Wanderers of Time" (originally "Jetsam of Time") rejected by *Wonder*, then by *Amazing* in 1932; "Exiles on Asperus," by *Wonder* and also by *Amazing* in, I think, 1932, in company with other stories such as "From the Vaults of the Moon," "Spheres of Hell" (not my title), "Invisible Monster," etc. *Weird Tales* rejected most of them, too. I had got a bit fed up with it when I learnt that *Wonder* had a new editor. So I then retyped the first page of each, with a new title just in case they had an efficient filing system of rejections there, and sent them in at discreet intervals.

[Only one example of the deception JBH describes can be documented from the Wyndham Archive. A form letter dated 26 October 1931 from David Lasser, Managing Editor of Hugo Gernsback's *Wonder Stories* rejects "Venusian Rescue" by John Beynon Harris. The same story appears in the September 1934 issue of *Wonder Stories* as "The Man from Beyond."]

15. Who did you intend to submit *The Secret People* to when you originally wrote it?

The Secret People (originally *Sub-Sahara*) had no target. I just thought it was about time I tried a book-length. It didn't seem to me suitable for American markets, and it did not appear in [the] U.S. until it was pirated in April 1950 by *Famous Fantastic*—though they did come across with \$300 later, under pressure. In 1935 it was serialised in the *Toronto Star Weekly*—on account of Matana's illustrations I guess.

[*The Secret People* was first published in London by George Newnes in May 1935. It was first serialised in the UK by *Passing Show* in nine episodes from 20 July to 14 September 1935. Each episode was excellently illustrated by Fortunino Matana who had illustrated E. R. Burroughs's work. The pirated and condensed *Famous Fantastic* *Mysteries* version has a cover and internal illustrations by Virgil Finlay. An updated version, with an introduction by JBH and a cover by Frank Frazetta, appeared from Lancer in 1964 and should be considered the definitive text.]

16. I take it both *The Secret People* and *Stowaway to Mars* were reprinted in *Modern Wonder* after their appearance in *Passing Show*.

Secret People was not reprinted in *Modern Wonder*. *Stowaway* was—with adaptations. They made the girl into a boy. I watched with interest to see how they would get out of the difficulties looming ahead. Apparently that had not occurred to them. In the end I got a rush appeal for a final installment. [Moskowitz gets this the wrong way round in a sentence added for the 1966 revised version of his June 1964 Wyndham profile in *Amazing Stories*: "the editors of *Modern Wonder* changed one of the men in the story to a woman." See "John Wyndham in *Sealers of Tomorrow*, 124. What actually happened was that "Joan" became "John". *Stowaway to Mars* (originally published by George Newnes in May 1936 as *Planet Plane*) appeared, under the title "The Space Machine," in *Modern Wonder* in ten episodes from 22 May to 24 July 1937, with illustrations, some amended because of the sex change, by Chester Todd. These illustrations first appeared in the eight-part *Passing Show* serialization of "Stowaway to Mars" from 2 May to 20 June 1936. The first American edition of *Stowaway to Mars* did not appear until December 1972, more than three years after JBH's death.]

17. What type of periodical was *Passing Show*?

The Passing Show was a general weekly magazine, one of a number which at one time and another had the ambition to become the English equivalent of the *Saturday Post*. It lasted a number of years, and probably came nearer to the target than most of its rivals. None of them succeeded in getting the right status, chiefly, I think, because conditions here were different from yours. For one thing we had several well-developed systems of book circulating libraries, so that there was not the same opening for a fiction periodical. After the war it was amalgamated with *Illustrated*, and died in the newer trap of trying to imitate *Life*.

18. Was "Sleepers of Mars" rejected by *Passing Show* and *Modern Wonder* or was it specifically written for *Walter Gilling's Tales of Wonder*?

"Sleepers of Mars" was done entirely for Wally Gilling's at a time when he was getting restive over having no material but reprints.

[John Beynon, "Sleepers of Mars," *Tales of Wonder*, no. 2 (Spring 1938). JBH's original title was "The Vacant City." In the 23 January 1938 letter to Gilling's accompanying his submission, he says "call it what you like." Presumably, "Sleepers of Mars" was Gilling's title.]

19. Up until 1939, were you selling much other than science fiction?

The odd story here and there, and one detective novel—well, three, but only one was published.

[The published detective novel by John Beynon was *Foul Play Suspected* (1935). Two unpublished detective novels, also featuring Detective-Inspector Jordan of New Scotland Yard, survive in the Wyndham Archive: *Murder Means Murder* (or *Murder Breeds Murder* and later *Burn That Body*) in 1935, and *Death Upon Death* in 1936. Both novels were rejected by numerous publishers.]

20. Your bibliography shows little or no science fiction by you appeared between 1937 and 1950. Were you writing during that period?

I only produced two or three stories during the Hitler war. There was "Phoney Meteor," *Amazing*, March 1941 (later rewritten as "Meteor") but I can't recall the others. Wartime wasn't conducive.

Before I got out of the army I decided against s.f. in favor of free fantasy. When I did get out (1946) I started on that. With my cash reduced, and prices higher, I reckoned I could last about a couple of years, and ought to have begun to sell something by then. But at the end of that time I was getting near broke, and still nothing sold. Then *Collier's* took "Jizzle," which just about saved me from trying to become a Civil Servant again. Meanwhile, I had begun to drift back a little towards s.f., but not the old type—or do I mean an older type?—at any rate not the immediately pre-

war mag. kind. I exhumed a story about general blindness, and one about triflids and put them together—that accounts for the double-theme form for which I still get reproached—and sent it to be typed. I knew the ending was no good, so I told the typist to lay off for a bit while I thought of another. About eighteen months later I remembered that it was still lying there unfinished, and managed to contrive a conclusion—of a sort. (It is always the endings that are the weakest part of these kinds of story—as you must well know—and one never seems to get any better at them.)

["The Living Lies": This was written in 1939, but appeared as by John Beynon, *New Worlds*, no. 2 (October 1946), 2–20. This account of racial problems on Venus is linked to anti-Semitism on Earth. "Phoney Meteor" (March 1941) was written in 1940, perhaps during the "phoney war" of September 1939 to April 1940. "Wast-Watch," an unpublished handwritten story based on his war experiences, survives in the Wyndham Archive. This story could have been drafted during the war but it seems more likely that it was written soon afterwards, perhaps between 1946 and 1949.

Post-Army JBH was, on 6 October 1946, "Released to Army Reserve." Of the twelve or so unpublished stories that were apparently written between 1946 and 1948 and have survived in the Wyndham Archive, only two can be described as fantasies, both being ghost stories: "They Always Find Out" (completed in 1946) and "Poised" (probably written in 1946). Much of JBH's energy during the 1946–48 period seems to have gone into writing two unpublished novels about resurgent Nazis, the spy thriller set in post-war London, *Project for Pirates* (drafted in 1946 and revised in March 1948), and the sf thriller about cloned Nazis, *Plan for Chaos* (originally entitled *Fury of Creation* and probably first drafted in 1948 and—correspondence with Pohl indicates—its revision followed the 1950 revision of *Triffids* for Doubleday (the American publisher) and then the final de-Americanizing revision in January 1951 for Michael Joseph (the

British publisher). It was completed by 1 September 1951, a few days after the 26 August British publication of *Triffids*). In the case of both *Triffids* and *Plan for Chaos*, JBH thought of first trying American publishers. See the Pohl Papers in Syracuse University Library.

"Jizzle": A Miss Christie, another of JBH's early American agents (overlapping with Forrest Ackerman) sold "Jizzle" (an off-beat fantasy about an artistic monkey named Giselle) which appeared as by "John Beynon" in the 8 January 1949 issue of *Cather's*, his first sale to this prestigious American magazine.

On the question of combining "exhumed" stories, please see the following article, "The Genesis of the Triffids."]

21. You might give a little information about the length of time you were in the armed services and what your duties were.

Wartime. Temporary Civil Servant in Censorship Aug 1940–Nov 1943, then Army until Aug 1946. Royal Corps of Signals. I was forty, and no technician, so too old for a commission, so I became an N.C.O. Cipher-operator, with the modest but comfortable rank of Corporal, in nice time for the Normandy invasion. That was interesting—a trifle over-brisk at moments in Normandy itself, perhaps, but, nevertheless, instructive. Not much of a soldier, I fear. Had a constant feeling I was there by mistake. Possibly that was because I had spent much of my school days expecting in due course to be in the Kaiser's war, though it ended when I was still too young. Nevertheless, I could not get rid of the feeling that *that* had been my war, and now I had somehow got into the wrong one. It produced odd moods of detached spectatorship, shot with flashes of *déjà-vu*. Took to writing sonnets because you can't carry a lot of paper on a campaign, and they are more interesting than crosswords. When things grew more static tried my hand at translating a French play or two, but lost the translations somewhere in Germany

Phobos by Ty Drago

New York: Tor Books, 2003; \$25.95 hc; 431 pages

reviewed by David Mead

Phobos. 1. (n) Greek word meaning "panic," "fear," or "flight." Root word of the modern "phobia." 2. (n) The larger and innermost of Mars's two moons.

It's 2218 A.D., and Mars has become a "third-world" world, a colony valued only for its sole useful product, the complex metal bauxonium. Mars's natives are despised by their colonial masters as stupid and defective, poisoned irrevocably by decades of inbreeding and pollution. Though hampered by biased aptitude tests and racist (planetist?) bigotry, Mike Brogue has become the first native Martian officer in the Peace Corps, the military arm of Solar Exploration and Development (SED), the corporation which rules extraterrestrial space. Lt. Brogue is a gifted problem solver who has found his place in the Tactical branch of the Peacekeepers. Thus, he is the one chosen to negotiate a hostage release when Martian freedom fighters (or terrorists) kidnap the mayor of Vishniac Colony and her lackeys. His success—which saves not only the mayor but also the city of six million inhabitants from a catastrophic dome collapse—puts Mike in the media spotlight and threatens to turn him into a political sideshow, ruining his career. To save him, his mentor, Col. Stryker, sends him to Phobos. A series of horrific deaths has disrupted work at Agraria, a private research station run by Wilbur Isaac, an industrialist who has pledged his life and fortune to terraforming Mars. It appears that an indigenous life-form is attacking the Agrarian researchers and their detachment of Peacekeepers. Since the discovery of alien life of any sort would change everything—for Mars, the SED, and Isaac's efforts to make Mars green—Brogue must resolve the mystery quickly.

On Phobos, before he can even begin to investigate the mysterious killings, Brogue has to overcome the suspicions and

hostility of the soldiers of his new command. A detachment of Peacekeepers (Halavero's Hammers), they remain loyal to their former commander, a victim himself of the Phobos Beast. Brogue's handling of his new unit shows his excellence as a leader and a problem solver. Having pacified the Hammers, he now encounters the equivalent of an English country-house mystery à la Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot. That is, there's a small cast of suspects, once the true nature of the Phobos Beast has been recognized, and it is up to Brogue, the outsider, to use his little gray cells to reason things through and then create the equivalent of a drawing room scene during which the guilty party will be revealed.

To say much more about the story would reveal the mysteries and ruin the fun. Lt. Brogue is a clever, interesting protagonist (of whom we would like to see more). The closed environment needed for the murder mystery is plausibly contrived. And the socio-political context is acceptably established. Although, and it is a minor quibble, how humanity gets from here to Drago's *there* is not made quite clear enough; especially, knowing that history is somewhat important to understanding the motivations of a number of the characters and the Martian culture.

Drago combines the military adventure with the detective mystery quite effectively. While he may not yet have joined the ranks of top of mystery writers like Paul Anderson (*The Queen of Air and Darkness*) or Jack Vance ("The Moon Moth"), for a first novel, *Phobos* is really damned good. Happily, the ending suggests that there may well be further adventures of Lt. Mike Brogue and his squad, the Hammers. I look forward to reading more stories by Ty Drago, who has made a very good beginning. ►

David Mead lives in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Good company among the Signals N.C.C.s.

[Flashbacks: The confusion of two world wars that JBH describes here no doubt contributed to his interest in time-switch stories and in scenarios of world change and catastrophe. At the same time, of course, his experience of the horrors of war also contributed a new realism and a new maturity to his fiction.]

Translations: Like the French translations, the sonnets JBH refers to appear not to have survived. A number of his poems, mostly written for Grace, survive in the Wyndham Archive. His only poem published so far, "Hiroshima" by John Beynon, may be found along with a translation in Spanish in the Spanish magazine *Nueva Dimension* (July 1973).]

22. The name Wyndham, where was it derived from? Does anyone in your family have that name? *

My father was one for genealogy. I am not, but I think he discovered some connection with a branch of the Wyndham family that settled in South Wales. Anyway, he conferred it on me as my second name, and, since there must be nearly as many John Harrises as John Smiths I decided to use [it] to lessen confusion. (As a matter of fact, all my writing names are also my own. The full baptismal roll—the inconvenient result for me of parental arguments resolved by compromise—being: John Wyndham Parkes Lucas Beynon Harris.)

23. What was the genesis of *Revolt of the Triffids*? How did it ever come to be submitted to Collier's? Had you sold them something previously? If so, what?

(See 20) The germ of the triffid was, I think, a sapling in a hedge. I passed [it] one windy night, and in the near-dark as if it were trying to make jobs at me with its branches.

The serialization in *Collier's* was a piece of Fred Pohl's work for which I am permanently grateful to him. (As I have said, they had already published "Jizzle.")

[*Collier's* published a shorter version of *Triffids* in which the plants come from Venus. JBH thought this more stock explanation would appeal more to the American audience. Doubleday preferred a version of his original cause, genetic experiments on Earth, as explained in part two of "The Genesis of the Triffids," below.]

24. Since *The Day of the Triffids*, you have more or less regularly produced some science fiction: *The Kraken Wakes*, *The Chrysalids*, *The Seeds of Time*, *The Midwich Cuckoos*, *Trouble with Lichen*. Is science fiction writing now your major occupation or do you write other things as well? *

Lately I have written disgracefully little of any kind. I find it hard to come by ideas suitable for my particular line of handling, and have been very dissatisfied with recent attempts. I'm hoping the phase will soon pass.

25. Have you a personal philosophy of what you'd like to do in the way of science fiction? *

What I would like to do in the way of science-fiction is to abolish the term entirely—if it were possible, to uninvent it. It is misleading and crude, a woolly-minded categorization meaning different things to different people which has done great harm to the imaginative story. Before it was coined, the inventive fantasy, and there were plenty of them, had a much better status than it has ever had since. It is unfortunate that, for lack of an alternative, one has to use the term sometimes, and thus help to perpetuate it.

[Throughout his career, JBH vented or adopted the following alternatives for "science fiction": reasoned stories, the tale of wonder, fantasies, the implicative story, the extrapolative story, the speculative story, conjectural fantasy, conjectural fiction, the threshold-of-possibility story, the scientific novel, reasoned fantasy, the imaginative story, the inventive fantasy, logical fantasy, and believable fantasy.]

26. Have you given up on the weird tale that you had a

pendant for in your younger days? *

Yes. My attempts to write weird and spook stories, though I could scare myself stiff while writing them, was a mistake. There are perhaps a few exceptions, but, generally speaking, the weird stories of the last fifty years are poor sweepings from a worked-out mine. The good stuff was all taken out of it by 1900 or 1910—and it had a good long run of a hundred years or so—the imitations since have been too palpable.

[The following pre-war, as-yet unpublished "weird and spook stories" survive in the Wyndham Archive: "The Carra" (November 1931); "The House at Hardease" (December 1931); "A Vision of Gilles" (January 1932); "The Visit of Johannes" (circa 1932); and "The Childecombe Curse" (early 1930s?).]

27. What early writers in or out of science fiction most impressed you? Are there any moderns you have a particular fondness for?

Wells, of course—though, as I have said, he did not write sf. He wrote novels and stories about people in various circumstances. What really distinguished his inventive books from his others (and him from the straight novelist who told a tale about people in everyday circumstances, from the modern novelist who tells no tale at all, and the "romantic" novelist who tells the same tale over and over again) was his use of extrapolation. Science and socialism happened to be the most obviously pregnant forces around just then, so they were the material he used—that is to say, his interest lay not (as Verne's did) in scientific marvels, but in the effects they might have on people.

[JBH distinguished between an American, Hugo Gernsbackian tradition of science fiction which emphasized science, technology, and gadgets in the tradition of Jules Verne and a British tradition of what might be called "conjectural realism" (or, to coin a term, "conjectural" fiction) exemplified by Wells and his own best work.]

28. Future plans? *

To get productive again—soon, I hope.

[JBH only published three new titles during the period January 1964 and his death on 11 March 1969: "In Outer Space there shone a star . . ." in *TV Times* (Christmas Extra) (December 1965); *Cheeky* (1968); an expansion of a 1963 story which probably originated pre-war; and "A Life Postponed," *Galaxy* 27 (December 1968). He also composed three stories which were not published in his lifetime: "Modification"; "The Best Thing . . ."; and an *Esquire*-commissioned piece based on the *Torrey Canyon* oil ship disaster, "Blackmoll: An Anticipation" (composed in April 1967, but *Esquire* had actually wanted a work of non-fiction comment). "Blackmoll" was published in 2000 in *No Place Like Earth*, edited by John Pean.

Much of JBH's time during the final years of his life was devoted to what he regarded as unsuccessful attempts to complete a novel about deadly spiders begun in the early 1960s as *The Little Sisters* and later titled *Web*. Eventually Vivian arranged the publication of *Web* in 1979. JBH's major source of inspiration was probably Captain S. P. Meek's long ago, routine, pulp story, "The Tragedy of Spider-Island," *Wonder Stories* 2 (September 1930). With *Web* and *Twey Flower* (a unfinished novel which Vivian completed after JBH's death), JBH returns to the fear of female sexuality that underlies *The Day of the Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes*.]

29. Please add any special remarks or anecdotes that suit you.

[Left blank]

30. Your high priority favorites of your own work. *

No. No favorites. There is not one that ought not to have been better. Ah, well. . . . Perhaps, one day. . . . ▶

John Wyndham (John Wyndham Parkes Lucas Beynon Harris), 1903–1969, was the author of *The Day of the Triffids* and many others works of fiction. Sam Moskowitz, 1920–1997, was the author of *A Science of Wonder* and many other works of history.

David Ketterer
The Genesis of the Triffids

I. The Questionable Genesis

My object here is to disprove a commonly accepted legend about the sources of *The Day of the Triffids*—the notion that John Wyndham (or John Beynon Harris [JBH]) combined an old rejected story that he himself had written about general blindness with another old rejected story that he himself had also written about triffids. In JBH's answer to question 20 in Sam Moskowitz's biographical questionnaire (see "Questions and Answers" elsewhere in this issue), we find this carefully worded sentence:

I exhumed a story about general blindness, and one about triffids and put them together—that accounts for the double-theme form for which I still get reproached—and sent it to be typed.

JBH leaves it ambiguous as to whether the stories he exhumed were of his own composition or someone else's. His use of the word "triffids" seems to be a reference to the ambulatory plants that he invented but could be understood as a generic reference to ambulatory vegetable life. Apparently, Moskowitz picked up on the ambiguity when he reproduces it in the corresponding statement in his profile in *Seekers of Tomorrow*. JBH

joined two ideas in his files, one on the theme of universal blindness and the other on a plant menace. The latter was illuminated in his mind when he was startled one night by the manner in which the wind made a sapling in the hedge appear to be making jabs at him. (128)

Moskowitz very specifically does not state that the two ideas were JBH's. And he does not do so because, as he goes on immediately to indicate, he was aware of stories by at least two other authors that fitted JBH's description: "Other stories that may well have influenced his handling of the two major plot situations in *The Day of the Triffids* were *Seeds from Space* by Lawrence Manning (*Wonder Stories*, June, 1935), with its intelligent plants grown from unknown spores, and Edgar Wallace's short tale *The Black Grippe* from the March, 1920 *Serend Magazine*, where the entire world is stricken blind for six days." I shall come to the evidence that JBH was definitely referring to "The Black Grippe" in a moment but first I want to emphasize the certainty that he would have been familiar with Manning's story.

Lawrence Manning (1899-1972), who was born in St. John, New Brunswick, Canada, and moved to the U.S. 21 years later, was, like JBH, a regular contributor to Hugo Gernsback's *Wonder Stories*. Manning contributed heavily during the period 1933 to 1935 while JBH, who read *Wonder Stories* from at least Sept. 1930, contributed eight stories during the overlapping period 1931 to 1934.

Indeed JBH served his apprenticeship with *Wonder Stories* and, as a result of studying the stories Gernsback published, he learnt how to write for the American pulp magazines. That may explain why he kept on submitting stories up to 1934 without Gernsback having paid for any of the preceding published ones. It was only late in 1936, after much importuning and after JBH finally had recourse to the Society of Authors, that payment was very belatedly received.

Manning's alien sentient "trees," which move around on their three roots, are dramatically illustrated by Frank R. Paul, in color on the cover, and in black and white on the page preceding the story. Anyone familiar with sf, looking at Paul's cover today would immediately link Manning's "trees" with Wyndham's "triffids." Manning shared JBH's interest in nature and ecology; he managed and eventually became the owner of Kelsey Nursery Service in New York and in 1951 he published *The How and Why of Better Gardening*. One of JBH's abandoned stories—"The D of D"—was directly inspired by the five 1933 Manning stories that were eventually collected as *The Man Who Awoke* (1975). JBH acknowledges his debt by naming the protagonist of "The D of D" Richard Manning. Manning's "trees" were undoubtedly an important source of JBH's triffids but JBH realized he now had to be more circumspect in admitting his debt. He must have been quite worried throughout the

1950s and after that Manning might sue. However, by 1964 when he responded to Moskowitz's questions, that was a lesser concern. He would always have been much less worried about "The Black Grippe"; Edgar Wallace had died in 1932.

Although Manning's mobile trees were almost certainly an important "source," or trigger, there are at least three earlier stories involving perambulating plants that JBH may have been aware of. The September 1928 issue of *Weird Tales* contains a story entitled "The Devil Plant" by the American author John Murray Reynolds; it includes a headline illustration by Hugh Rankin. At the story's end, a threatening mobile plant, the result of experiments on carnivorous plants in Brazil, is still at large. Hugh Rankin (1879-1957), the American illustrator for *Weird Tales*, also illustrated American author Edmond Hamilton's mobile and man-eating plants story, "The Plant Revolt," in the April 1930 issue of *Weird Tales*. Two months' later "The Beast Plants," an illustrated story by Rich [Harold] Thompson, an occasional contributor to *Weird Tales*, appeared in *Argosy* (26 July 1930). It deals with a gigantic mobile Venus fly trap, again the result of a genetic experiment, in a swamp area of Georgia. (These stories are described in Everett F. Bleiler's *Science Fiction: The Early Years*, 337, 621, 623.)

Clearly, dangerous mobile plants were something of a cliché over a three year period, or over seven years if we include Manning's story. It would be very difficult to point to a single originator of an idea which includes Tolkien's ents and which might be traced back at least as far as *Machbeth's* famous couplet: "I will not be afraid of death and banes / Till Birnam Forest come to Dunsinane" (5.2: 61-62).

So JBH had no particular reason to fear charges of plagiarism regarding a stock idea. Perhaps he was worried because he had developed not one but two ideas that had been used by others. Less than two months before JBH died on 11 March 1969, he received what he might well have regarded as an alarming letter dated 31 January 1969 from a Londoner named John Elson:

I have been asked by H. W. Wilson's Ltd, the New York publishers, to write a biographical article about you, for . . . *Mid-Century Authors*. . . . Unfortunately, I can find very little biographical material about you. . . . I have managed to discover . . . Sam Moskowitz's *Seekers of Tomorrow*. . . . but I would be extremely grateful if I could confirm some biographical details with you, and add, if possible, to the information available.

In order to improve on Moskowitz's "pretty sketchy" account, Elson suggests the possibility of a meeting or of his sending JBH a number of questions. I have already observed that JBH did not much like answering any biographical questions, whether bland or probing, at any time and he must have realized that, pruned by Moskowitz's essay, one of Elson's questions would have been about the two stories combined in *Triffids*. Usually, JBH replied to correspondents promptly and wrote the abbreviation "Rep" and a date on the letters to which he replied. There is no such notation on Elson's letter. It seems likely that JBH ignored Elson's requests in the hope that he would go away. Unfortunately, it was JBH who went away permanently and thus we have been denied what might well have been an authoritative English biographical source surpassing Moskowitz's in importance.

With some assistance from JBH's surviving brother Vivian, Elson did write a sketchy biographical piece based on secondary material including Moskowitz's essay. It was published as an anonymous entry (Elson is listed among the contributors but the authors of the specific entries are not identified) in 1975 in *World Authors 1950-1975*, edited by John Wakeman.

Certainly, Moskowitz did not want to accuse the man who had so generously answered his questions of plagiarism and so (with his sentence about a sapling in the wind quoted four paragraphs above in between) he deftly juxtaposes his ambiguous reference to combined ideas from JBH's files with his reference to the two "other" stories which used the same ideas. On his typed letter to me of 29 May 1996,

Moskowitz added this "P. S." with a black ballpoint pen: "The material in my book on Wyndham was reviewed in article form [in *Amazing Stories*] & no corrections made at time of publication by the author under discussion." Moskowitz must have hoped that JBH would provide not only corrections but confirm his suspicion about the Manning and Wallace stories. JBH wisely chose to say nothing and so the relevant passage in *Seekers of Tomorrow* corresponds almost exactly to that of a year before in *Amazing Stories*. If Moskowitz was wrong about the stories, he had, after all, given JBH an opportunity to deny knowledge of them.

The persistent assertion that JBH cobbled together *The Day of the Triffids* out of his own two previous rejected stories next gets an airing in "Talking with John Wyndham" under the byline "Pooter" in *The Times Saturday Review* for 16 March 1968:

Among his rejected stories was one in which everyone went blind. It had a happy ending, people recovered their sight. Editors did not like it, they called it anticlimactic. . . . He had another rejected story, about some mobile vegetables, "but I thought, they're slow moving and easily dealt with. Where's the plot coming from?" It came from that other discard about blind people.

Everything here that states the stories were JBH's own is in Pooter's words. In talking to Alex Hamilton, the fantasy author behind the "Pooter" byline, JBH was probably very careful to ambiguously word his responses as in his question 20 answer to Moskowitz. Hamilton may very well have done his homework (and as Elton would do) read Moskowitz's profile before interviewing JBH. If so, he may have come away from Moskowitz's ambiguous wording with the impression that the stories that were combined were JBH's. For us, of course, it is only necessary to assume that JBH would have suspected Hamilton of having read Moskowitz's profile essay. It is the new detail about the blindness story which decisively points to "The Black Grippe." Set in the near future, "The Black Grippe" is about a disease that will cause the entire human race to go blind for a period of five to ten days. If it lasts only five days the human race will survive, if longer probably not. Although London burns, everybody's sight (except that of those previously blind like the woman with whom Dr. Bevan falls in love) returns after six days and the overall damage is less than expected. As is apparent from Hamilton's summary (probably gleaned from JBH's ambiguous account), readers were disappointed by this bathetic happy ending.

The day after JBH's death on 11 March 1969 an obituary appeared in *The Times* that was substantially based on Pooter's "Talking to John Wyndham." The combined rejected or discarded stories myth is described this way in the obituary: "It was in 1946 that he blended two discarded stories into one entitled *The Day of the Triffids* and took on the pseudonym John Wyndham."

Ironically, I have discovered that, in composing *The Day of the Triffids*, JBH did in truth combine two stories of his own—at least much of one story published in 1938 and an element from discarded unpublished story fragments that were probably written in 1946. A 1938 story, "Puff-Balls," originally published under an editor's title as "Spheres of Hell" (*Wonder Stories*, October 1938; republished as "The Puff-Ball Menace," JBH's title, in 1938), involves a deadly, toxic, weird (non-ambulatory) plant. This story appearing in *Wonder Stories* (illustrated, as was common with Gernsback's publications, by Frank R. Paul almost two years before the *Wonder Stories* publication of Manning's "Seeds from Space" (also illustrated by Paul) might well have inspired, or helped inspire, Manning's tale. As in *The Day of the Triffids*, the male and female leads are separated for much of the story. Dorothy Forbes, the love interest in "The Puff-Ball Menace" is the same person as Jocella Playton, the love interest in *Day of the Triffids*; they are both based on Dorothy Joan Parkes, the beautiful first cousin with whom JBH was in love or infatuated with for so many years of his life. (In an interview with John Barrows, JBH "explained" his protracted bachelor status: "I met the right person twice, but on each occasion she met a righter person" [225]. For a detailed identification of the beautiful Dorothy Joan Parkes as the first Mrs. Right, readers must await my forthcoming essay, "John [Wyndham] Beynon's Case for Rape in *Starmaway to Mars*.")

Given Moskowitz's encyclopedic knowledge of sf, it is surprising that he does not point to the quite obvious relationship between "The Puff-Ball Menace" and *Day of the Triffids*. Had he noted that relationship, he would surely also have noted the likely relevance of a contribution to the December 1930 issue of *Wonder Stories* to the inspiration of both "The Puff-Ball Menace" and *Triffids*—Roger Wulfres's "The Air-Plant Men" (with illustrations by Marl Marchioni). What would surely have stuck in JBH's mind is most apparent from these lines from the boxed editorial commentary designed to entice the reader:

We are accustomed to thinking of sentient beings in terms of human or other animal life. We cannot conceive, for example, of a plant having "a brain." Yet the functions that many plants perform are in reality no less complicated than our actions, and if the ability to adapt oneself to circumstances is intelligence, we must admit this quality in many plants. . . .

It is not far-fetched, then, to give to plants a will to have control over the earth and displace men. What prohibits them from any such action is that they are fixed in place for their entire lives. But suppose there arose a plant that was not fixed but could "feed" wherever it wished. Then, endowed with mobility, such a sentient plant would indeed be a menace to our race, as our author shows in this thrilling story. (740)

I have not been able to find out anything about Roger Wulfres or locate any other stories by him. But because his one commercially published story (if that is in fact the case) surely was the seed of "The Puff-Ball Menace" and so of *The Day of the Triffids*, a summary is in order.

Biologist Doctor Destanac and Roger [Wulfres] travel to Shadow Island in the Cambrian because Sibly, Destanac's assistant and Roger's fiancée, has been captured by the air-plant "men" which feed on the perfume emanating from death lilies, the pale blue flowers to be found on the island. As described in section 3, "The Menace of the Air-Plant Men," "men" would appear to be a misnomer. They are air-borne "balloon-shaped creatures" (741) trailing powerful tentacles which can mangle and kill human beings. It is only the horizontal ring of eyes to be observed where the jelly-fish-like entities, more accurately described as pear-shaped, begin to narrow that suggests some kind of animal component. JBH's simpler, air-borne, spherical plant threat in "The Puff-Ball Menace" is non-sentient and much more realistic. Wulfres's air-plant beings are further described as "a compound creature using a community brain" (746). JBH's sentient triffids (and his Midwich Children) will share a similar group consciousness. Sibly is rescued and this particular group of air-plant beings are defeated when it is decided to use explosives to destroy an embankment and so flood their food source, the death lilies. But there are other air-plant creatures feeding on other death lily patches elsewhere in the world and they remain "a menace to posterity" (749). Likewise, JBH's mobile triffids will remain a threat when the novel ends. Wulfres' Doctor Destanac supplies a Darwinian explanation: "Judging, then, by what had gone before [the history of species], the fact is pertinent that the creature which is to replace man must be already somewhere on this earth of ours" (744). This survival of the fittest explanation finds its echo in *Triffids* and much of JBH's work.

For the most reliable account of the genesis of *Triffids*, we must turn to JBH's brother Vivian. The almost-impossible-to-read handwritten completed short memoir (a planned longer one was only started) that was discovered after Vivian's 1987 death includes this statement about JBH: "He took an old short story and amplified it, humanized it, added his own brand of sentiment and compassion to it, and produced *The Day of the Triffids*, still selling steadily after all these years" (Harris 24). There is no mention here of JBH combining two of his rejected early stories. Vivian is talking about an early story that was published—"The Puff-Ball Menace"—and how JBH turned it into a novel. Except for the addition of the blindness theme, *The Day of the Triffids* is a direct expansion of the "The Puff-Ball Menace" with the yellow puff-balls mutated into yellow-headed triffids.

Why does Vivian not mention the story's title? Unfortunately, he is often vague about names, dates, and other factual details in his various

recollections but, in this instance, it is possible that he was following his brother's wishes. Clearly JBH did not want it known that *The Day of the Triffids* was essentially a longer version of "The Puff-Ball Menace." In no document that I am aware of does he associate the two stories. What was the problem? I can only suppose that JBH realized that, if he mentioned "The Puff-Ball Menace," that would draw attention to *Wonder Stories*, the magazine in which it was first published, and increase the likelihood that someone checking out that magazine would come across Manning's "Seeds from Space" in an issue published less than two years later (and Wulfe's "Air-Plant Men" in an issue published less than three years before). And so what JBH seems to have regarded as a dangerous can of worms would have been opened.

But what about the second of JBH's own stories that played a part in the composition of *The Day of the Triffids*? The comet trailing green shooting stars that causes blindness in *Triffids* is the same comet that causes extreme heliocentricity in an incomplete, untitled, projected novel or novella that survives as manuscript fragments in JBH's hand in the Wyndham Archive. These fragments of a novel or novella, which (for ease of reference) I have entitled "Lui's Story," were probably written in 1946. Smoke from volcanic eruptions on the Pacific island of Wainoroi in 1976 has the effect of "blinding" its inhabitants in the sense of preventing them from seeing and being malevolently influenced by the green shooting stars that lead to the rest of Earth's inhabitants destroying one another with atomic weapons. Decades later, an enterprising Wainoroi native named Lui sets out, with some companions, to find out if there is any kind of world beyond their island existence.

The malevolent comet in "Lui's Story" was Wyndham's response to the benevolent comet in H. G. Wells's *In the Days of the Comet* (1906). And of course, the title *In the Days of the Comet*, with an assist from the day of the Martians in *War of the Worlds*, became *The Day of the Triffids*.

Perhaps the wisest conclusion regarding the misleading combination of two old/discarded/rejected-stories explanation would be to suppose that, in the interest of simplifying a complicated (and potentially contentious or even litigious) genesis story, JBH actually combined on the one hand Manning's "Seeds from Space" and Wulfe's "Air-Plant Men" (and perhaps other mobile plant stories) with his own "Puff-Ball Menace" and, on the other, Wallace's "The Black Grapple" with the comet from his own discarded fragment "Lui's Story." It may of course also be that, when mentioning exhuming only two stories in answer to question 20, he was picking out only the two most important sources of *The Day of the Triffids* and they would be one of his own old stories and one not his own: "The Puff-Ball Menace" and "The Black Grapple."

It is possible that JBH indirectly (and very inconspicuously) acknowledged his debt to Lawrence Manning's "Seeds from Space" with the similar title of his 1956 collection *The Seeds of Time*—none of the stories included is so titled. However that may be, the literary seeds in time which flowered as *The Day of the Triffids* were (or included), in chronological order: Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898), Wells's *In the Days of the Comet* (1906), Wells's "The Country of the Blind" (1911), quoted from in the Penguin *Triffids* page 81), Wallace's "The Black Grapple" (1920), Wulfe's "The Air-Plant Men" (1930), JBH's "The Puff-Ball Menace" (1933), Manning's "Seeds from Space" (1935), and JBH's incomplete "Lui's Story" (circa 1946). In aesthetic terms and in terms of overall interest, *The Day of the Triffids* dramatically exceeds all of these sources except *The War of the Worlds* and "The Country of the Blind"—and it comes close to equaling those masterpieces.

II. The Manuscripts

The composition of *Triffids* can be approximately dated from late 1946 to February 1948 and then, about eighteen months later, to late 1949. During the gap, JBH revised the unpublished novel *Project for Pithul* and wrote the first draft of the unpublished *Fury of Creation/Plan for Chao*. The revised Doubleday typescript of *Triffids* was begun in April 1950 and completed by 4 May 1950, the date JBH mailed the revised Doubleday typescript to his agent, Frederik Pohl, according to Pohl's papers at the library of Syracuse University.

The Wyndham Archive includes three (a, c, and d) of what were at least four complete and distinct *Day of the Triffids* texts: (a) a largely

holograph (handwritten) manuscript; (b) a typescript (now lost?) based on the holograph MS; (c) the revised final ribbon typescript heavily cut by Doubleday; and (d) the carbon copy of the same final typescript but much more lightly edited by the London publisher Michael Joseph.

(a) The 345 page largely holograph MS (of which 57, near the beginning, are typed) opens with a "Foreword" which provides a far future (twenty-first century or later) frame:

William Masen was not a person of any importance in the pre-catastrophic world. He was an ordinary man of his time . . .

To us a great deal that was taken for granted in the 20th century civilization must seem fantastic, and inevitably certain allusions and passages in Masen's story are now obscure . . .

We learn that the Tuesday, 8 August catastrophe in *Triffids*, which is not dated by year in any of the published texts, occurred in 1965: it is "a bit ironic that in 1965 no one gave Gabriel [with his end of the world trumpet] a passing thought." In all the published texts the reader is informed that "You'll find it in the records that on Tuesday, May 7, the Earth's orbit passed through a cloud of comet debris" (page 12 in the Penguin edition). JBH did not consult a perpetual calendar for dates in 1965. In that year 7 May was a Friday and 8 August was a Sunday. In the main text, the first four chapters are the most heavily revised. For example, a passage dealing with a "Venusian disease" (13, among the typed pages 9-61) is cut.

(b) Doubleday editor Walter L. Bradbury had apparently recommended a few changes to the 375 page typescript submission, now apparently lost, that were based on the holograph MS. Its page length is known because the number is mentioned in JBH's letters to agent Pohl of 8 April and 9 May 1950. Bradbury's report is implied by a mention in the first surviving letter of JBH's correspondence with Pohl (see Pohl's papers). In his letter of 25 March 1950, JBH deals with four revision issues that Pohl had raised in a previous, now lost, letter, the first of which (an objection to the frame) seems to have been endorsed by "Mr. Bradbury." JBH believes that the "Foreword" "would be much better as an epilogue unless I can contrive to weave it in somehow as a hopeful note right at the end." As for point number two, JBH explains that the Venus

origin of the triffids was written in as a kind of dangle for the science-fiction editorial mind. It doesn't belong, it did not exist before, and it shall disappear . . . I will revert to some form of terrestrial generation for [them].

As for English "slang," "Maybe the best way would be for me to let the words stand and ask that someone may be found kind enough to put in substitutes for those thought [too] baffling." Finally JBH agreed that he would try and improve the "section where you feel it sagged." (This led to expansions and probably to the more effective and sentimental revision of the euthanasia/suicide episode at the end of Chapter 8; the male plague victim in the holograph MS becoming the young female in the published text.) In his follow-up letter to Pohl of 3 April, JBH says "I think I see a way to include the gist of the foreword at the end of the story without too much cleavage of continuity." For the result see the last section of the published novel.

In JBH's letter to Pohl of 25 March 1950, he had said, "I'll work with the carbon and leave the top copy with you as you suggest, to do with as you think best." Pohl submitted that top copy (the ribbon copy) to Collier's. Pohl informed JBH of Collier's acceptance on 6 November 1950. Because Collier's copyist was JBH's shorter first typescript, entitled by Collier's "The Revolt of the Triffids" (serialized in five episodes from 6 January to 3 February 1951), it includes the inserted, second-thought Venus explanation that JBH had mistakenly believed would appeal more to an American publisher of sf than his original more mundane (Russian?) explanation.

(c) The 411 page ribbon typescript used by Doubleday (a revision produced during the period late March to 4 May 1950 of (b), the previous 375-page typescript) indicates that the changes Pohl (and Bradbury?) had suggested were made. There are numerous American usage changes. For example, Chapter 11, ". . . And Further On" becomes ". . . And Farther On." And there are lots of cuts. Timothy

Seldes of Doubleday, who made the cuts, wrote to JBH on 8 August 1951 suggesting he look over the typescript (now reduced to 378 pages) before approving the cuts. In his letter to Pohl of 12 October 1950, JBH explained that he approved the cuts and had only inserted transitional sentences in three places.

(d) The 411-page carbon typescript [of the pre-edited (c) typescript] was submitted to Michael Joseph and accepted by JBH's friend at the firm, Robert Lantry, in an enthusiastic letter dated 19 December 1950. The corrections JBH subsequently made to this typescript includes changing American terms back to English ones. For example "elevator" is changed back to "lift." In her diary entry for 4 January 1951, Grace wrote that J "is de-Americanising the Tiffids for Bob . . ." Oddly, the curse word in "Well, damn me, mate, so it is" (present in the holograph MS and the American text) is censored and becomes "—me" in the British text (see the Penguin edition, 163). But Michael Joseph only made one really significant cut. Because it is on typescript page 266, which is part of a larger passage cut by Doubleday, I print it here for the first time. If included in the published text, it would figure near the end of Chapter 10, immediately following "deny with conviction that she's done so" (Penguin 178):

Feeling is like a ~~familiar~~ ancestral divan: reason's a new bed you have to build for yourself—a bit hard to begin with, and at least you knew where the main lumps were in the old one."

"And a few spots of decay here and they'd not bother you," Coker added.

"But the trouble is the whole frame's rotted, and unless something's done there'll be only the floor in a hut."

"Oh, dear me, no," I said. "I tell you, you're in too much of a hurry. What you do is repair. First you get a new

mattress, then a new cover, then a new frame, and new legs, until there's none of the original left—but you're prepared to swear that you're still sleeping on the same old bed."

Clearly, JBH was not an emotional, demolish-and-replace, social radical, he believed in a patient, rational, inconspicuous programme of constant repair and restoration as a way of hanging on to as much as possible of what was comfortable about the past. As a consequence, things may not get too much worse and even improvements, of a gradual and limited kind, may be possible. "Lumps" may be eliminated. ►

David Ketterer lives in London and Liverpool, UK, where he is working on a critical biography entitled John Wyndham: The Winslow Cuckoo.

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The Sight by David Clement-Davies New York: Dutton, 2002; \$21.99 hc; 480 pages reviewed by Brian Attebery

As adult fantasy grows ever more formulaic, the young adult category (though by no means free of formula) offers some of the more original and surprising fiction around. *The Sight* is unusual in three ways: It is an animal fantasy focusing on predators rather than cute furry critters. It uses a locale more familiar to horror readers than fantasy fans. And it plays out within a real historical framework. What we have is wolves in Transylvania and the Balkans in about the fifteenth century, when the real Vlad Dracula was battling Turks. Wolves are not particularly interested in human politics, but they are aware of battlefields and corpses littering the countryside, and they are very much interested in human incursions into previously wild territory. Their point of view provides an interesting commentary on human priorities and perceptions. With these innovations, the book ought to be more enjoyable than it is, but the working-out at the level of sentence and incident is, unfortunately, more pedestrian than the overall conception.

Any story set in Transylvania must acknowledge some debt to Bram Stoker and the legends that he drew upon. *The Sight* is in some ways *Dracula* turned inside out. In this version, the "children of the night" that Stoker uses mostly for atmospheric effect are now the heroes, and the supernatural is a route to salvation rather than leading to the damnation of vampire existence. There is even an inverted version of the shapeshifting Count: in this case, a lupine prophecy about the Man Varg who will combine the powers of man and wolf.

The central characters are two young wolf siblings, Larka and Fell. One is light-colored and the other is black, and the color symbolism is just about what one would expect: Pale Larka is the visionary and dark Fell is the potential betrayer. In the course of their cubhood, we listen along with them to the pack's inherited body of lore, which is one of the book's strengths. Clement-Davies has invented a body of legends, a religion centered on the wolf-gods of sun and moon, and a whole set of terms for wolfish roles and customs. I confess that I tended to lose track of some of these. I knew *varg* already, because it is the Swedish (and general Germanic) word for wolf—equivalent to Tolkien's *warg*.

Dragga and *drappa* indicate the alpha male and female of a pack. *Lera* are beasts of all sorts. Other terms are left in English form: the legendary Wolfbane, the ghastly Searchers, and the Sight itself. *The Sight* is a blend of prophecy and clairvoyance that sets Larka and Fell's family apart from most other wolves and makes them targets for the malevolent Morgra. Morgra is Larka and Fell's aunt and has the Sight herself, but she is an outcast with a special hatred for her former pack.

The story takes the form of a fairly standard fantasy quest. Will the good guys find the sacred site and the MacGuffin (in this case a kidnapped human child) and come into their full powers before the villains manage to do so? Clement-Davies subjects his heroes to an unusually brutal set of obstacles along the way. Cursed by Morgra, the members of Larka's family die off at an alarming rate—I was reminded of Ernest Thompson Seton's life histories of wild animals who all seem to end up drowned, frozen, or eaten. We get some relief when two of the reported deaths turn out to be, in Mark Twain's words, greatly exaggerated. We actually get two villains instead of one: Slavka, like Morgra, is female, embittered by early tragedy, and leader of a brutal band of henchmen. The main difference between the two is that one is a skeptic, the other a believer in the power of the Sight. Though they are opposed to one another, both harass the heroes single-mindedly. And that single-mindedness is one of the main problems with the novel. Each of the main characters is defined by a single trait: Morgra is pure vengeance, Slavka is denial, Fell is jealousy, Larka is guilt. The result is not only poor characterization but frequent lapses into idiom plot. You can be sure that at any given crisis each of the heroes will do whatever is most likely to derail the quest. When it is vital to stay together, Larka will run away. When secrecy is imperative, somebody will let out a howl. Mark Twain noticed this same tendency in James Fenimore Cooper: "Every time a Cooper person is in peril, and absolute silence is worth four dollars a minute, he is sure to step on a dry twig." It is a relief when the main characters begin to act sensibly, but that does not happen until late in the story, and even then there are relapses into idiom.

Another problem is that, as in most animal fantasies, the natural history of the animals involved has to be integrated into an essentially human model of character, and Clement-Davies has not entirely managed this integration. All too often, the wolves, while behaving like a realistic pack of animals, talk like bratty teenagers, mustachioed movie villains, or New Age gurus. "For you draw on the wilderness," says a newly guruized Fell to the human child, "as the Sight draws on the energy that dwells in all" (455). This vaguely spiritualized view of nature replaces or absorbs the wolves' previous mythic structures.

That move seems problematic as well, for if the Sight is merely natural energy and the gods mere embodiments of it, where did the prophecies come from and why are they so accurate?

Perhaps younger readers would be able to ignore these flaws and take more pleasure in the writer's inventiveness than I was able to do. I found much that was admirable in the novel's conception but too much that fell short in its execution. ►

Brian Atchery lives in Pocatello, Idaho.

A New Dawn: The Complete Don A. Stuart Stories by John W. Campbell, Jr.
Framingham, Massachusetts: NESFA Press, 2003; \$26.00 hc; 462 pages
reviewed by Joe Sanders

Works we now recognize as science fiction have been around much longer than the name "sf." The first volume of Gunn's *The Road to Science Fiction* gives many samples of proto-sf, and Sam Moskowitz labored mightily—though not quite convincingly—to discover a self-conscious community of sf readers and writers that had existed for centuries. My guess, however, is that only in the late nineteenth century was there enough realization of accelerating scientific developments—and of how pliable society could be as a result—to encourage the writing of enough sf to reach critical (in more ways than one) mass. Finally, in the sf magazines a few decades into the twentieth century, sf did achieve self-awareness as readers, editors, and writers discussed the nature of this thing. Each issue of the early magazines can be seen as the meeting of a debating society, not just in the letters column and the editorial but in the stories themselves: "Science fiction" should be about this but not that; it should say this . . . Sometime, once the magazines are available in safely digitized form, this will be a debate worth analyzing in detail. (The few copies of the early sf pulps that I own are extremely fragile, steadily turning into brown shreds; I hardly dare read them.)

In the meantime, we have books like this one. We should be very grateful to NESFA Press for gathering all the stories John W. Campbell, Jr., published under the pen name Don A. Stuart. For sometimes the debate about the nature of sf went on not just between individuals but within an individual.

Before Campbell became editor of *Astonishing* in 1937, and well before his thinking congealed and he became a true believer in Dianetics, the Dean Drive, and the social/personal benefits of slavery, he was writing sf under his own name that rivaled Doc Smith's optimistic space operas for showing huge problems that roused humans to create wonderful solutions, such as his 1934–35 serial "The Mightiest Machine."

Then Campbell began writing other stories, so different that he used a different name when they were published. "Twilight," in the November 1934 *Astonishing Science Fiction*, was the first of them. It's the narrative of a scientist from our future whose experiment throws him into the far distant future, where he sees the human race waning, sinking into darkness. Trying to return to his own era, the scientist overshoots and lands in twentieth-century America, where he summarizes his experiences to an ordinary citizen, a real estate agent, who filters it again (though he supposedly repeats the scientist's words verbatim) as he tells the tale to the story's presumed writer. Barry Malzberg's introduction is dead-on acute in the surprisingly large number of areas where his attitudes do mesh with Stuart/Campbell. He stresses the spirit of *fin de siècle* in "Twilight," but if so that florid decadence has been transmogrified into an apparently wholesome American form, a story that could appear in a newsworthy pulp magazine. The style of "Twilight" varies between the scientist's reactions to the immense but dying human civilization, a lyrical mixture of awe and horror, and the groping, stunned reaction of the motorist who picks up the scientist as a hitchhiker and who doesn't know what to make of the tale his passenger tells as they travel on through the night. These layers of narration and reaction may be what makes the overall story so effective. Despite the driver's superficial, boosterish attitude, his troubled reaction validates that the scientist told his story impressively, and it also lets the third layer of

storytelling—the person who tells us the story—comment on the original hearer and his reaction. The phantom narrator is a device used in several other Stuart stories. He operates as a supposedly objective observer; he has no personality and takes no part in the action—he only testifies that other people sincerely believe what they're reporting. He further validates the outlandish tale, making it more acceptable for readers.

Viewing this successive removal from the action and its associated emotion in the context of early twentieth-century American writing, readers may notice how much it feels like what Sherwood Anderson (and Hemingway, Hammett, Lewis, etc.) was doing in fiction, especially with prose style. Writers had learned—partly by their own comparisons of literature and life, partly by comparing official rhetoric during WW I with the awful reality—to distrust eloquence. Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) is an attempt to put into words the feelings that ordinary, inarticulate people couldn't verbalize because they were too disturbing. Such prose is deliberately groping, colloquial, anti-eloquent. In the second paragraph of "Twilight," right after the contemporary Everyman has prattled about "the wide spaces of the West" and "this great beautiful country," the shrewder, third level narrator comments,

Jim Bendle's a real estate man, and I knew how he could go on. That's his favorite line, you know. He's real worried because there's a lot of homesteading plots still open out in our state. He talks about the beautiful country, but he never went farther into the desert than the edge of town. 'Fraid of it actually. . . .

This ironic, down-home humor is set against the wonderful but chilling picture of a darkening Earth, far distant in time, long after the human race began to dwindle, farther still from when it was numerous and ambitious enough to spread out to fill much of the North American land mass—whereupon, the mood is again broken:

"I never believed that, when he said it," said Jim, interrupting himself. I knew he didn't. If he had I think he'd have bought land somewhere along there and held for a rise in value. I know Jim. He have had the idea that seven million years was something like seven hundred, and maybe his great grandchildren would be able to sell it. (34)

The irony plays against and reinforces the pathos of the scientist's description of feeble, hopeless humans of the far future, whose perfectly designed machines will go on working endlessly and purposelessly after life has ceased. The scientist himself stumbles as he speaks, fumbling for the right way to grasp and express the futility in his own and all humanity's existence:

I was the first of the new race . . . The new race—oh, holy destiny—what has—what will—What is its end? I have seen it—almost. I saw them—the little men—bewildered—lost. And the machines. Must it be—can't anything sway it? (21).

"Twilight" puns forth a seriously anti-modern American formula: success = failure. In the distant future, human scientists have mastered matter. There's nothing more to learn. Humanity also has reached the limits of the solar system, where it has been stopped. Unable to surpass

the speed of light, humans can't reach the stars. The last humans can only contemplate past successes, and that's not enough to provide the will to continue. Furthermore, the story shrewdly observes that successive "advances" in recording keep actually seal information away from anyone who doesn't have the obsolete technology (the reviewer said, thinking of the boxes of Beta tapes in his basement, next to the cartons of laser disks), so that far-future humans are cut off from scientific manuals even if they might be interested in attempting further research. Also, the scientist reports that in attempting to get rid of natural threats and pests, humans had to wipe out more and more organisms until there is no life form waiting in the wings to replace the dying race. By using all its talents to the utmost, humanity achieved perfect control over its environment, and the ultimate result is listless stagnation, sterility, and numb hopelessness.

The scientist doesn't want to accept this conclusion, but must because he's seen the situation firsthand. Jim doesn't want to understand it, let alone believe what he hears, but he finally does too because the tale was told vividly and because the teller "wasn't an ordinary man" (37). The narrator finally says that he's convinced, even hearing the story at second hand, because an extremely ordinary man was so affected by it. This multi-layered gloom is partially countered by the scientist's last attempt to recreate the essence of humanity by combining thinking machines and ordering the more powerful unit "to make a machine which would have what man had lost. A curious machine" (36).

Albert I. Berger's *The Magic That Works: John W. Campbell and the American Response to Technology* (Borgo, 1993) reports how, in a story published under his own name ("The Last Evolution" [*Amazing*, August 1932]), Campbell actually endorsed the notion of machines replacing humans. In this early story, Earth is threatened with an invasion by aliens

armed with a weapon that destroys all organic life. Earth responds by building a self-replicating machine capable of independent reasoning, and capable of building a robot armada to defeat the invasion and making improvements in the original model as it learns from battle experience.

The aliens are defeated, but only two humans survive, both male. Before they commit suicide, they speculate that the new form of life may be superior to the old. As Berger summarizes this conclusion, "Perhaps the human purpose has been fulfilled by creating a new mechanical form of life, a form of life stronger, more adaptable, better than people because it was designed" (28). What makes humans "human"? If what really matters is our fine minds, not our embarrassingly lumpy bodies, an outcome that preserved our manner of thinking might seem like a happy ending.

Almost certainly, the immediate desires and expectation of the reader of an American science-fiction magazine in the mid 1930s were much more in tune with "The Last Evolution" than with "Twilight." But it's the latter that made an immense impression because it made readers consider something they resisted. And Campbell wrote both stories.

The Israeli writer Amos Oz has commented that when he has an idea on his mind he writes an essay, but that when he's not sure what's on his mind he writes fiction. Multiple characters, a series of scenes, interacting or colliding chains of events—all can express a writer's uncertainty memorably even if they can't resolve it any better than Hamlet does. In Campbell's case, by the time he began writing stories as Stuart, he already had learned how to write a kind of story that editors and readers liked. He couldn't make much money doing that type of fiction, but then nobody could make a living as an sf writer. It went without saying that if stories would never appear in book form, that they'd only be read again if someone hunted up back issues of the pulp magazines. However, forgetting about fortune or fame, it must have been stimulating to take part in the magazines' debates about the importance of scientific thinking, the responsibilities of technology, and the future of humanity. It must have felt good. But what if such a writer began to wonder if he completely believed what he was writing? What if he picked up on the grim ambiguity of H. G. Wells's early anticipations? He might find himself writing stories in another voice to test his earlier certainties. He might become so concentrated through

that challenge that he wrote far above his comfortable range and created a genuine work of art.

"Twilight" is a work of art; that's the reason I've spent such so much space talking about it. It still is, awkwardly and comfortably, moving. It deserves its place in the *SFWA's Science Fiction Hall of Fame*. Campbell's other Hall of Fame story is another Stuart story, the novella "Who Goes There?" Written years later, it's a much more straightforward, less stylistically experimental story than "Twilight," and it comments interestingly on the doubt expressed in "Twilight" and many of the other stories in *A New Dawn*. Everyone knows the basic plot: Alien monster invades an isolated scientific base in Antarctica; humans figure out how to defeat it.

But consider, for a moment, the two films based on the story, Howard Hawks's 1951 *The Thing* (from *Another World*) and John Carpenter's 1982 *The Thing*. The earlier film simplifies almost everything in the story's plot but stays true to its emotional arc. There's initial uncertainty/fear until the humans figure out that the alien creature is an intelligent vegetable; they then trap it and kill it. That "thing" is clearly, undeniably non-human and monstrous. Using more advanced special effects, Carpenter is much closer to the original story's version of the monster as an (almost) undetectable shape-changer that can mimic each of the men in an Antarctic base as it kills and absorbs them. Each new monster is an independent, competitive unit, willing to destroy any of its fellows in order to survive. The challenge is to detect all the aliens. At the end, the monster seems to have been defeated, but two survivors stand in the smoldering ruins of the base, staring at each other, not quite sure that they are human; without that certainty, neither can relax his guard, so the only thing to do is keep watch as they both freeze to death. As in "Twilight," their success does not mean they have triumphed.

"Who Goes There?" certainly ends more optimistically, as the true humans cooperate and dispatch the last monster while capturing the super-scientific alien gizmos it was building to escape from Antarctica and conquer the world. However, as students point out every time I teach the story, an albatross flies away from the camp just before the humans attack the last monster. The survivors tell themselves that the monster wouldn't have bothered to mimic another creature when it was so close to success. Really? When each individual thing acts independently, to survive at all costs? The story's conclusion reminds readers that the happy ending occurs not just because the survivors cooperated and because they were clever enough to figure out how to distinguish humans from monsters but mainly because they were lucky. That's nothing to rely on for humanity's long-term survival.

So Campbell's Stuart stories range from gloomy to highly qualified, rather dubious optimism. As far as quality, the other fourteen stories in *A New Dawn* are a mixed bag, depending on Campbell's grappling with different degrees of optimism/pessimism and the engagement he was able to bring to each position. "Night" (*Amazing*, October 1935) returns to the world of "Twilight" in order to shut off the last glimmer of hope by showing the curious machines' futile existence in an exhausted solar system. "Forgerfulness" (*Amazing*, June 1937), on the other hand, suggests that losing conscious understanding of technical details, as the little men in "Twilight" have done, may not be a sign of decline after all. It anticipates Clarke's idea that advanced science would look like magic. Two series of stories show humans casting off the domination of aliens, but only after the weakness has been bred out of them through generations of slavery. The first batch—three stories beginning with "The Machine"—is especially incoherent. The second batch—the "Aesir" stories—is more smoothly told but breaks off after two stories, before the humans triumph. Both series leave unclear whether humans discover their innate talents or just utilize what they've learned from their masters—or, again, whether thinking reasonably, like a human, is more important than a being's physical form. Besides those stories, I'm personally fond of the second Stuart story, "Atomic Power" (*Amazing*, December 1934), because it describes a worldwide catastrophe almost as effectively as Wells's "The Star" (and in similar archaic, King-James-Bible cadences). It anticipates Asimov's *The Gods Thaw together* while maintaining a Wellesian ambiguity: The characters solve their immediate problem, but they're

too distracted, too short-sighted, and generally too human to understand the whole situation.

In short, this is an important collection despite and sometimes because of its confusion and awkwardness. It's not surprising that Campbell settled later for a simpler, more comfortable view of reality; the wonder is that he struggled with his uncertainty as long as he did and that he expressed it so memorably in several of these stories. Nowadays, to judge from a typical issue of *Asimov's*, for example, "sf"

means almost anything: science fiction, magic realism, retro space opera, post-modern tall tale . . . whatever. Still, it's not necessarily useless to consider how writers discovered the range, the myriad possibilities of this kind of storytelling. To do that, we should pay attention to John W. Campbell, Jr.

To both of him. Every him. ▶

Joe Sanders lives in Mentor, Ohio.

Darrell Schweitzer An Interview with Lloyd Arthur Eshbach

Lloyd A. Eshbach (1910-2003): US writer and publisher, and an sf enthusiast from an early age. Though his work as a publisher has always been deemed his main contribution to the field, a spurge of novels in the 1980s, after he had been inactive as a writer for many years, has focused some attention on his authorial work. He began publishing sf in *Scientific Detective* in 1930, and for some years wrote fairly prolifically; the best of this early work was assembled in *The Tyrant of Time* (1955), a volume published by his own Fantasy Press, which he had formed in 1946; it was probably the best of the small presses founded after the war to put into book form the novels and stories that had been accumulating in magazines since the founding of *Amazing Stories* in 1926. For Fantasy Press, Eshbach edited the first published book about modern sf: *Of Worlds Beyond: The Science of Science Fiction Writing* (1947), a symposium of essays by such authors as John W. Campbell Jr., Robert A. Heinlein, and A. E. van Vogt. *Over My Shoulder: Reflections on a Science Fiction Era* (1983), told in memoir form, is a history of the sf specialist presses from the 1930s to the 1950s.

—excerpted from the *Science Fiction Encyclopedia*

This interview was recorded at Philcon, 1999.

Q: I am sure that science fiction was very different when you first started reading it. What do you remember about what drew you to it at the time?

Eshbach: Two older brothers, who were readers, one bought *Argosy* and the other *All-Story Weekly*, which published stories by Edgar Rice Burroughs, A. Merritt, Homer Eon Flint, Austin Hall, and other pulp writers of that day. My brothers saved these magazines, and so even before my teens, I read A. Merritt and some of these other writers, Burroughs in particular. So I was introduced to science fiction before the term was even invented, through my older brothers.

Q: And so you found that if I had something to offer that no other type of pulp fiction did—

Eshbach: I just thoroughly enjoyed them, although I read westerns and practically everything else. Sports stories, I remember. When *Amazing* came out, I bought the first issue and every issue thereafter for a long time, and the other magazines that followed.

Q: Did you find yourself immediately attracted to the Gernsback idea of science fiction or to the *Argosy* type? Which did you prefer, technical gadget stories or action-adventure?

Eshbach: Actually, Merritt was the one I preferred above everybody else. A. Merritt. And Homer Eon Flint second Austin Hall, I remember. They had something that the others didn't have. Burroughs . . . Tarzan, yeah. When I was a kid I enjoyed Tarzan, of course, and later the Martian stories. I remember that in junior high school, I would sit in the science class with my hand raised, and answer any question that came up. Once the teacher asked about the solar system and I described it. I said that there were two moons of Mars, Deimos and Phobos. He said, "Wait a minute. That isn't in the book. Where did you get that?" I couldn't tell him that it was Burroughs's Mars books where I'd read this, so I said, "Well I read it in a book somewhere."

Q: How did you and the readers of the day react when Gernsback began to reshape science fiction into his own model of it? Instead of

lots of thrilling action and rescuing princesses, one character would say, "That's amazing, Professor. How does it work?" and the professor would go on lecturing for three pages, with footnotes. How did readers feel about this change?

Eshbach: Well, I had been reading *Weird Tales* before *Amazing* came out, so some of their stories fell into the science fiction category. I don't think they called them that, though. They were less impressive than the stories in *Argosy*. But then when *Amazing* came out, it had reprints of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. These stories were sort of dated. They didn't have the life of the ones I found in the pulps. But then, of course, new writers came into the field, and in due course I was one of them.

Q: When did you realize that you wanted to be a writer?

Eshbach: In junior high school. I wrote short stories for the school magazine, and they were published. I still have copies of them, by the way. But I wouldn't want them reprinted now. No, they weren't science fiction. They were sports stories and—frankly, I don't remember anymore. Let's face it, I am eighty-nine years old, and my memory isn't all that it once was.

Q: How long did you attempt to write science fiction before you started selling it?

Eshbach: Actually, I think I sold the third or fourth story I wrote. As a matter of fact, this book just came out, *Pioneers of Wonder*, edited by Eric Leif Davin, or written, really, by Eric Leif Davin, and one of the chapters in it is a taped interview, just as we're doing now, "The Birth of Science Fiction Books: a Conversation with Lloyd Arthur Eshbach." It begins with the opening of my first published story, "A Voice from the Ether," which was published in *Amazing*. By the way, that story was accepted when I was 19, and it was published when I was 21. They held onto it that long, and paid me half a cent a word when they published it, finally. In the morning mail that day, I got the acceptance of "A Voice from the Ether," and in the afternoon mail—there were two mail deliveries in those days—I got a second acceptance from *Science Wonder Stories*. Of course both of them paid a half a cent a word on publication, and they weren't in a hurry to publish.

Q: I am sure you didn't worry about the money. But one of the things I now realize is that in those days half a cent a word couldn't have been too bad. If a working man's salary was, say, twenty dollars a week, and you just sold a 4000-word story, you made a week's salary.

Eshbach: I was quite impressed by being paid at all. In the high school paper where my first stories were published, of course I didn't get anything. Naturally. A school paper called *The Magnet*. I still have copies of them. They're not bad. . . . [Laughs.]

Q: So you then sold to most of the science fiction magazines being published. Did you envision yourself having a career as a writer at that point?

Eshbach: I don't really think so. It was a nice hobby, and it paid off. I got money for it. Not a great deal, but I got money. I enjoyed doing it. But I never thought of making a life's work out of it, till after I became an advertising copy-writer, for Glidden Paint Company, to start. I went on from there to advertising manager of Moody Press and Moody Bible Institute, and so on. So I made writing a career, but not fiction writing. Advertising.

Q: At what point did you start to come into contact with other science fiction writers, meeting them or corresponding with them?

Eshbach: I can't really remember when I attended my first

science fiction convention, but I know I was at the first ones ever held. But they're so far in the past that I can't remember when they were, or where. In the '30s, probably.

Q: Actually the first one was in Philadelphia in 1936.

Eshbach: [Laughs.] It was, was it?

Q: I suspect the "first convention" consisted of a handful of New York fans visiting a handful of Philadelphia fans and declaring it a "convention" in retrospect.

Eshbach: I remember getting together with a bunch of science fiction fans, but I'm 89. My memory isn't all it once was.

Q: Do you recall when the science fiction field had some sense of identity, and science fiction writers thought of themselves as science fiction writers?

Eshbach: I remember getting together with other fans, and among them a few writers, but the details are all fuzzy. Too long ago! I'm getting too old!

Q: You made a certain amount of history yourself, mostly by starting Fantasy Press.

Eshbach: With my contacts with publishing and the printing business, I got the idea of starting Fantasy Press. Well, Arkham House beat me to it, of course. But then I decided to publish Doc Smith's work in books, and with my contacts with printers through my advertising, I organized Fantasy Press. I was partners with men I worked with, A.J. Donnell, who was an artist at the Glidden Company, Herb MacGregor, who was the associate editor of the publications from the Glidden Company. We formed Fantasy Press. Eventually I bought out my partners, and it was totally mine. Then it later incorporated, and so on and so on.

Q: It was certainly a brave thing to do in those days. [Eshbach is laughing softly.] I mean, the big problem was how you sell the books. This is still the problem, but how did you get them into the stores in those days?

Eshbach: As I remember, we sent review copies to the science fiction magazines, and eventually they published reviews, and then we started getting letters from fans. Eventually this whole thing built up, until we were in business.

Q: In other words, mostly direct mail, catalogues, and such.

Eshbach: Oh, yeah. And of course we started approaching bookstores, since, working with Moody, I had made contacts with religious bookstores. But then we contacted stores to sell science fiction, secular bookstores. The whole thing worked out, to a degree.

Q: When you started, it was pretty much a buyer's market. You could get just about any material you wanted—

Eshbach: Oh, yes. There was not much competition because there were so few publishers of science fiction books. But then we started getting competition, Gnome Press, and of course Arkham House still published some science fiction occasionally. There were others, but I can't think of the names of the other competitors now.

Q: It would seem to me that the most significant competitor you had was Doubleday. What happened when the big companies got involved in science fiction?

Eshbach: They could make deals that we couldn't touch, and it became increasingly difficult to get stories to publish. We could only get what the big boys turned down. So when they went into it in a big way, it was the beginning of the end for the small guys.

Q: It looks like you survived until science fiction switched heavily into paperback. You had Doc Smith and the big boys didn't.

Eshbach: Well, our contacts still prevailed, and of course we knew more about the field than even the editors of these major publishers. They didn't know the field, which gave us an advantage. Of course there were limitations, since we didn't have the money they had.

Q: If you look at what Doubleday published as opposed to what you published, you can see that Doubleday wanted Robert Heinlein and Ray Bradbury. They did not want A. Hyatt Verrill. They wanted contemporary writers with ongoing careers, not old stories from old magazines. They were going for a general audience rather than the fan audience.

Eshbach: We were fans and their editors were not, and that made a big difference, because published what we as fans wanted to have published. It made a big difference. Of course it didn't mean a great deal financially, unfortunately. I kept dragging on, into a number of

years, when the going was rough for the small publisher. I had built a following for Fantasy Press, which helped me hang on longer than my competitors, than some of them anyway.

Q: How did it finally end?

Eshbach: [Laughs softly.] I went broke, very simply. I sold, in book sales, remainders. Of course once in a while, reprints were made in paperback, and I got paid in part. Depending on my contracts with the authors, part of it went to me and part of it went to them.

Q: Then you returned to writing again in the '80s.

Eshbach: The '80s were the big years for my writing, when I had six novels published, and the autobiography, and other things, in the magazines as well as in book form.

Q: You hadn't written much since the '30s, and fifty years later you were writing again. That also must have been a fairly brave leap. How did it feel to return to writing after that long?

Eshbach: I had a job. I had an income. So it was a sideline. It wasn't nearly as much of a gamble as it would seem to be. If I didn't sell, I didn't sell, because I still lived and I still supported my family. So, financially, it wasn't that vital. And I did start selling, so it helped.

Q: How had you found the field had changed, in the sense of what readers and editors wanted and what you could get away with?

Eshbach: Details escape me because it is too far in the past. Even in the '80s, it still goes back a good distance. But my own reading in the field, with the successful writers of the day, enabled me to, if necessary, imitate those that were selling. I had enough experience in the writing to craft what I felt would sell, and which the editors evidently thought would sell as well, the editors of the pulp publishers, the editors of the magazines and of the hardback books.

Q: When you were writing for Del Rey Books in the '80s, did you keep up with contemporary science fiction?

Eshbach: Oh, yes. Of course Lester del Rey knew science fiction. He was a science fiction writer himself. So we worked together in some cases. Sometimes he made suggestions that I do this or I do that, which I followed, which made good commercial sense.

Q: This is still something of an accomplishment on your part. There were a lot of writers, your contemporaries, whose careers were essentially over by 1940, for all they may have been trying to write for decades thereafter. But somehow you got into the major publishing houses again. So what's your secret of success?

Eshbach: I was a reader on the current material, so I had knowledge of what was appearing, and it influenced what I wrote. I wrote aiming at the markets, which is commercial, of course, but it paid.

Q: If we consider the writers who survive versus those who don't, say, Jack Williamson as opposed to Neil R. Jones (who was also trying to sell stories into the late '80s), it may be that the really important part is not that they keep up with the field, but that they keep up with the world.

Eshbach: It's difficult to pinpoint exactly how they did what they did. But you had to keep up with contemporary life, and what other readers were reading, to go along and sell commercially.

Q: Are you doing any writing now?

Eshbach: Two novels in the works, completed but requiring polishing. Whether or not, at my age, I will complete the work, I don't know. I can't say at this point.

Q: Have you got publishers for them?

Eshbach: I haven't tried. They're not the finished work that I know they should be. They're not the finished work that I am hoping, I may live long enough to get into commercial shape.

Q: I suppose you now have the longest perspective of anyone in our field aside from Jack Williamson. What do you think of the way that science fiction has turned out?

Eshbach: To be truthful, because of the weakness of my left eye, I don't do a lot of reading anymore as I once did, so I don't keep up with what others are doing. I can't really comment on what the field appears to be today. I'm out of touch with it. But I think I have enough background commercially, maybe, to keep up in these two novels with what's being written. In the later years of my writing, I wrote much more rapidly than I did in my earlier years. These, as I say, require polishing, but there are limits to what an 89-year-old man can do. ►

Darrell Schweitzer lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

One Lamp: Alternative History from The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction,

edited by Gordon Van Gelder

New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003; \$15.95 tpb; 433 pages

reviewed by Greg Beatty

As the subtitle suggests, *One Lamp* collects the best alternative history stories from the pages of *F&SF*. In his introduction, Gordon Van Gelder, the magazine's current editor, explains some of the thinking that went into choosing these fourteen stories and especially why some well-known stories, such as Ward Moore's "Bring the Jubilee," are not included. He also provides a list of the other stories that had to be excluded due to lack of space. That list is impressive, as are the final contents of this volume, but that's to be expected, given the stellar reputation *F&SF* has had for over five decades. In fact, it's so much to be expected that the straightforward reviewing task is easy. The stories are good; the collection is good. I delighted in rereading old favorites like Paul Anderson's "Delenda Est," and in discovering new gems I'd missed like Paul Di Filippo's "And I Think to Myself, What a Wonderful World."

But given that starting point (that the collection is good, and the stories deserving of attention), that leaves several larger questions standing, ones that Van Gelder touched on in the introduction: What is alternative history (or at least, what are these stories)? What does it do and what is it good for? What does it mean that it is flourishing now? I'd like to spend the bulk of my review wrestling with these questions.

To begin with, some observations. Of the fourteen stories in this collection, three were originally published in the 1950s, one in the (late) 1980s, seven in the 1990s, and three in 2000 and after. Though Van Gelder's introduction lists three stories from the 1970s that he considered including, the overwhelming majority of those included or considered come from recent decades. As a simple observation, the 1960s and '70s were focused elsewhere: SF was fighting for or against the New Wave, feminism, and other changes in the field. On the plus side, this recent surge in alternative history can be seen as a sign of a subgenre coming into its own as authors realize the rich possibilities inherent in writing about history. This is due to the ongoing labor of writers such as Harry Turtledove and also to the work of individuals like Robert Schunk, who has poured love and scholarship into his Uchronia website (www.uchronia.net), providing access to alternative history for those who love it, and as well to the Sidewise Award, which has recognized the best work in alternative history since 1995.

However, there's a down side to this trend as well, one that is exposed more fully by comparing the three stories included from the 1950s to those written later. The three stories from the 1950s are C. M. Kornbluth's "Two Dooms," Paul Anderson's "Delenda Est," and Alfred Bester's "The Men Who Murdered Mohammed." These three wonderful stories share a refreshing boldness. Kornbluth's lead character is a physicist working on an American project to develop atomic weapons who stumbles through a crack in time with the aid of local Native magic mushrooms—to find himself on the other side of World War II and inhabiting a North America divided between Japanese and Nazi rule. Published barely a decade after the end of WW II and still boiling with post-war anxieties, Kornbluth's story has all the weaknesses of the '50s—latent racism, folksy dialogue, cardboard female characters—but all of its strengths as well. Ideas come a mile a minute, and the possibilities in this new realm are drawn in bold, daring strokes. He's not afraid to distinguish between an idea used as an excuse (the mushrooms used to leap across time), and ones he's concerned with as a serious idea.

Anderson's "Delenda Est" stretches across even broader swathes of time. It begins on a hunting expedition in Europe 40,000 years ago, and agents of Anderson's Time Patrol visit every time and place imaginable. The combination of boldness and invention for invention's sake make this story a joy, and the act of deduction his agents have to perform to figure out what has happened to destroy their timeline (so they can restore it) is equally joyous in itself, even though it costs them dearly as individual characters.

And Bester, well, this bit of lovely time-spanning fluff about taking revenge on a cheating wife by traveling back in time to change

the present has a serious idea at its core: We all design our own histories and must make sense of them.

Despite Bester's whimsy, "Mohammed" shares several defining characteristics with the other earlier stories in this collection. First, the earlier stories all contain clear mechanisms by which reality (and history) is transformed. Each of these stories was written and published as science fiction, an observation that seems obvious until one looks at how far alternative history has spread in recent decades. Academic historians have written several volumes postulating alternative time lines (*What If?* and *What If? 2*), and the idea of branching or bifurcating timelines has spread through the mainstream and beyond, appearing everywhere from popular sitcoms to works of fantasy like the Harry Potter series.

With the shift from "How?" to "What if?" in more recent stories comes a shift in style and emphasis. Their focus is tighter. Even striking, brutal stories like Harry Turtledove's "The Last Article," in which Gandhi attempts to lead India to freedom from Nazi rule, focus more fully on the individual's struggles. While the ideologies of Nazism and non-violence are implied quite well in the characters of Field Marshall Model (nice name for a living example of Nazism!) and of Gandhi, the focus is still on individual struggles. Again, there are many positive benefits to such a focus. Maureen McHugh's "The Lincoln Train" focuses on the pain suffered by one woman in a country writhing to find itself after Lincoln's near-assassination leaves the Union without clear leadership. It is an exceptionally well-written story, and it captures the textures necessary to make this period real. The crowd surrounding the suffering woman feels real and only a breath distant. Likewise, Charles Coleman Finlay's "We Come Not to Praise Washington" captures the seely, desperate atmosphere of a United States laboring under the tyranny of Alexander Hamilton (who takes the title "Washington") and does so through creating characters woven into the social and historical fabric torn by the early death of the first Washington, George.

I could go on and on listing the social milieus evoked wonderfully by the authors in this collection—Jan Lars Jensen's blend of British and Japanese histories and anxieties in "The Secret History of the Ornithopter" or Paul McAuley's "The Two Dicks," an homage to Philip K. Dick that captures both Dick's peculiar habits and psyche and the national paranoia produced by living with Nixon—and all of them are indeed nicely done. But the focus is much more on the individual, and much more on the minutely known. The later writers have all clearly done their research on the details of the different periods, and they write exceptionally well—but almost none of them strikes the bold notes that the earlier writers did. The clearest exception here is James Marrow's "Auspicious Eggs," which creates a decidedly alternative history of the world to cast a satirical and analytical gaze upon church policies on reproduction. (I'm not exactly sure this is alternative history, in the sense of a divided timeline, but I'd be lost as to what else to call this engaging piece.) Jensen's story about an alternative development of aviation, is also both complex and ambitious, but then . . . for whatever reasons, the contemporary stories are less bold.

The question might be raised, then, what do these later stories do? One answer is that they celebrate and honor. Again, Van Gelder briefly mentions in his introduction the tendency to write alternative history about science fiction; I want to expand on that here. Some of these stories, like McAuley's "Two Dicks" mentioned above, share extended in-jokes. You have to know SF, and the relationship between Philip K. Dick's life and his fiction, to really get how good this story is. And then there is Paul Di Filippo's joyous, lovely "And I Think to Myself, What a Wonderful World," which manages to reflect on true threat of infernal tyranny the United States poses to itself in times of war—while writing a love letter to both jazz and SF. I didn't believe Di Filippo's story for a second, but I smiled continuously as I read it. It was like a good moment of improvisational jazz. The story gave pleasure for its own sake, and

took joy in the ability to do and invent. However, it was also a kind of ceremonial story, a call for science fiction to pause and realize how much it has done, and how wonderful it (and its process) is.

There is also a less joyous inward turn in these stories, and I've taken to calling it the sense of dodging a bullet. It's almost a Whiggish history, but instead of writing a factual history celebrating how we had to follow the line of historical development that we did, many of these writers present an alternative history with the apparent intent of showing how much things would be worse if we changed anything. Ben Bova's "Café Coup" shows a time traveler coming back in time to prevent Hitler's rise—only to create a worse French tyranny under de Gaulle. Finlay's story shows how we barely missed tyranny in the United States after the Revolution; McHugh's shows how we barely missed anarchy after the Civil War; Bradley Denton's "The Territory" shows an America still torn over slavery and fighting in the Kansas territory; Turtledove shows how lucky the Indians were to face the British, not the Germans; and so on.

This is a conservative position in many ways, and these stories are conservative in other ways as well. Of the fourteen stories, thirteen were written by men, a ratio that hasn't existed in science fiction in general in some time. Only McHugh's story has a female lead character, and only the Morrow and Anderson include major female characters. The rest have long-suffering supportive wives (Bova), cheating wives (Bester), near-slave wives (Kornbluth), foreign, non-stealing wives (Janssen), and so on. Many of the stories include essentially no women at all (a passing servant, perhaps). Again, I find this conservative in itself, conservative in its history (the great man theory of history really is a great man theory, in this case), and a touch sad and bone-headed. Sad, because judging by this collection, there have been no great alternative history stories in *F&SF* focusing on women (and frankly, because some of these stories read like the authors want to escape to worlds without women, and because reading so many of the stories in a row, there's an overall thread indicating that no matter what changes, men will be in charge), and bone-headed, because a focus on women seems one obvious way to produce genuinely new work.

The final positive development I want to note in these later stories is a serious consideration of just what history is. The two (very

different) stories that engage in the most serious contemplations of history are Robert Silverberg's "A Hero of the Empire" and Dana Wilde's "The Green Moon." Silverberg's story comes from his Roma Eterna setting, and in it a representative of Rome, exiled to "far off Arabia" meets Mohammed and foils the rise of Islam. This story incorporates Silverberg's decades of historical study, so that the first-person narrative feels real. Rome is the baseline by which things are judged here, not modern America, and Roman self-interest, cynicism, and rationality are the qualities that are enticed and threatened by Mohammed's spiritual fire. Silverberg convinces as he evokes this positioned psyche, who can feel the historical forces at play around him—the story is a master's work. At the other end of the alternative history spectrum is Dana Wilde's "The Green Moon." In it, history (mostly the 1960s to the 1990s America) shifts around. Wilde offers theoretical explanations of these changes, and they are intelligent theories, but the story's success is in evoking the isolation and anxiety that a divergence between history and memory would create. How would you deal with such a thing without going crazy? Both of these stories show a strong understanding of how fully we are created by our histories, how difficult (impossible?) it is to stand outside of those histories, and how important it is to understand them.

And that importance might be the final great value in the contemporary rise in alternative history. It is so easy to put history behind us. It isn't just a matter of forgetting, because at core, there's a lot of work involved in learning to understand history. It requires scholarship, patience, an ethical perspective, and so on. But these stories show us first the joy in knowing history, and second, the textual and conceptual richness that can come from working with it. Third, these stories make us recognize on an emotional level just how important historical perspective is to *us* and the world. Obviously, I'd like to see that continue. I'd also like alternative history to learn from its own past to produce rich new visions as bold as Anderson or Kornbluth's, but as well-textured as the more recent stories, resulting in more genuine and meaningful alternatives. That, I think, would be a pretty big change in alternative history all by itself. ▀

Greg Beatty lives in Bellingham, Washington.

***Deluge* by Sydney Fowler Wright**

Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003; \$65.00 hc/\$22.95 pb; 330 pages

reviewed by **Walter Minkel**

Deluge, first published in 1927, has been republished by Wesleyan University Press as part of its "Early Classics of Science Fiction" series. But after I finished it, I asked myself, "Huh? Did I miss something here?" because I can't figure out how this book can be considered *sf*. The only reason I can figure is that its author wrote a number of *sf* novels and stories, as well as crime novels and more mainstream fiction. Fowler Wright (1874–1965) wrote another novel that's still remembered by *sf* fans, *The World Below* (1929), a tale of a time traveler who ventures into a future so far off that the human race has disappeared. Humanity has been replaced by three races of being called the Amphibians, the Killers, and the underground Dwellers.

While *The World Below* is richly *sf*nal, there's only one bit of *Deluge* that is—its prelude, which is five pages long. It is, of course, an important bit; the world is hit by an earthquake, the earthquake sets off a global flood, and that flood washes most of civilization away. Here is the way Fowler Wright begins his story:

To an observer from a distant planet the whole movement would have appeared trivial. There was probably no point at which land either sank or rose to one five-thousandth of the earth's diameter. But water and land were so nearly at one level that the slightest tremor was sufficient to either drain or flood them.

The surface trembled, and was still, and the Himalayas were untroubled, and the great tableland of Central Asia was still behind them, but the tides lapped to the foothills of the south, and India was no more, and China a forgotten dream.

Once before the earth had trembled along the volcanic fissure which was then the fertile Eden of the human race, and a hundred legends and the Mediterranean were its mementoes.

Now it sank again, slightly and gently, along the same path. It was as though it breathed in its sleep, but scarcely turned, and Southern Europe was gone, and Germany a desolation that the seas had swept over.

Occan covered the plain of the Mississippi, and broke against the barrier of the Rockies. The next day it receded, leaving the naked wrecks of a civilization that a night had ended.

Now, there is no way—unless, maybe, an asteroid hit the planet—that the kind of disaster Fowler Wright describes could happen. But that's beside the point, because Fowler Wright has not created a Wellsian *sf* novel. No scientist survives in this story to attempt to explain the disaster, and how this disaster happened doesn't matter. *Deluge* isn't, from this point on, an *sf* story at all, but a parable of social criticism that requires the fingers of a *deus ex machina* to flip a very large switch and then to vanish.

Anyone who has read global-disaster stories written since 1927 should know *Deluge*'s message well—that civilization has softened up most of us city- and suburb-dwellers to the point of decadence and uselessness. Those skills we've mastered as part of our daily lives—how to operate a car or a vacuum cleaner or an adding machine—are irrelevant once a disaster of this scale hits. It takes tough, superior folk

to triumph.

This kind of message assumes that when a disaster strikes, humanity will quickly revert to its "nasty, brutish, and short" Hobbesian state. Little criminals will pull out any weapon that comes to hand and turn themselves into little tribal chieftains, gathering a band of like minded but less intelligent thugs, stealing all the good stuff, raping the women, and murdering anyone who tries to stand up to them. All of us soft civilized folk will thus be doomed unless our salvation comes in the form of a "strong-man" savior—someone of sufficient moral and physical strength to defeat the little chieftains.

And so it is here. Martin Webster, a handsome, commanding lawyer, is separated from his wife Helen and their two children during the flood and unsuccessfully attempts to save them. Believing them lost, and finding no other survivors, he travels until he discovers how few of his fellow humans have survived and how many of those have become members of criminal gangs. He scavenges what food and goods he can and establishes a home far from the main roads.

But one day near the newly created coastline he spots a woman swimming toward him. Her name is Claire; she's strong and determined, and she had been training to swim the English Channel. Martin brings her to his new home and learns that she had swum away after being trapped on a sinking island with two brutish men, both of whom had tried to claim her as their own. Fowler Wright makes it clear that fewer women than men survived the disaster in their piece of the English countryside, although he doesn't say why. Thus women are now highly prized possessions of the criminal gangs.

An H. P. Lovecraft Encyclopedia by S. T. Joshi and David E. Schultz

Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001; \$75.00 hc, 339 pages

Lovecraft's Library: A Catalog, Revised and Enlarged by S. T. Joshi

New York: Hippocampus Press, 2002; \$15.00 tpb; 175 pages

reviewed by Henry Wessells

To produce an encyclopedia is essentially a political act: to strike a spark into the tinder-dry edifice of the *ancien régime* (in the case of Diderot and his contemporaries); to assert the sum of learning with the elegantly phrased, patriarchal arrogance of empire (here I'm thinking of the eleventh edition of the *Britannica*); or, in more recent memory, to throw open the doors of the labyrinth and propose a complex new way of approaching the literature of the fantastic (in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*). The consequences of these acts are not to be disputed; what differs is chiefly a matter of scale or scope. It is not unreasonable to look to these three instances as benchmarks for examining different aspects of another encyclopedia. Other criteria will also suggest themselves.

The appearance of *An H. P. Lovecraft Encyclopedia* with the imprint of a noted scholarly publisher is an event that might still have seemed impossible a decade ago. It is cause for celebration in Lovecraft circles, no doubt, but this must not preclude a clear-headed assessment of how well the book achieves its stated aims and how useful an encyclopedia it is.

In their introduction, Joshi and Schultz note the "marked rise in Lovecraft's literary recognition as a writer, thinker, and man of letters" as a result of the scholarship of the past decades: "It is in the hope that a gathering of widely dispersed information on Lovecraft will engender even more penetrating scholarship and also provide Lovecraft's many devotees with the tools for a more informed appreciation of his work that the present volume has been assembled."

The *Encyclopedia* provides main entries on Lovecraft's literary works and brief biographical sketches of persons who figured in his private and literary life (also a handful of writers whose work influenced Lovecraft: Bierce, Dunsany, Machen, Poe, Blackwood); "Lovecraft is best known for his tales of horror and the supernatural; accordingly, the compilers have provided detailed plot synopses of every fictional work—stories, sketches, collaborative works, 'revisions' or ghostwritten tales—written by Lovecraft from the age of seven until his death." Entries also include story length, dates of composition and publication, and citation to the corrected text. When a manuscript exists, its institutional location is cited. Poetry, essays, and letters are given more selective coverage. In

Soon Claire is taken prisoner by one of the gangs, and the gang's chieftain makes no secret of the fact that she is now "his woman." But she and Martin contrive her escape, killing the chieftain and several of his men. In the months that follow, they fall in love and work together to bring order and a new set of rules to the scattered survivors. Not long after, Helen and the Webster children, who had been rescued, and hidden by a local farm woman, are returned to the amazed Martin. In what amounts to a good third of the book, Claire, now pregnant by Martin, and the other characters discuss who is Martin's wife—Claire, Helen, or (gulp) both? These last hundred pages of the book may well be of interest to social historians and supporters of libertarian polygamy. And although they—and really all of *Deluge*—may technically be considered sf, they certainly don't feel like it. They're also far from gripping reading.

This new edition of *Deluge* does, however, have a worthwhile introduction by author and academic Brian Stableford, who has done an excellent job of placing Fowler Wright's work in the context of British writing between the world wars. He interviewed members of the Fowler Wright family, and he writes a first-rate quick biography of the author and his struggles to succeed as a novelist and writer of screenplays. But I only hope that Wesleyan or someone else will release a new edition of *The World Below*, a much better and more wondrous and affecting book. ▶

Walter Minkel lives in Forest Hills, New York.

each entry, discussion of critical articles follows the synopsis.

The book shows its strengths in a selection of representative entries on stories and persons both familiar and not: "The Music of Erich Zann," *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, "The Shunned House," "Polaris," and the decidedly minor "Reminiscence of Dr. Samuel Johnson." Ranging in length from a third of a page to more than three pages, these entries outline the events and imagery of the tale, record observations on Lovecraft's literary and biographical sources or his own opinion of the work, and then include citations of critical writings. A similar wealth of information is found in biographical entries for such figures as Lovecraft's wife (Sonia H. Davis in later years), Frank Belknap Long, Harry Houdini, Lord Dunsany, childhood friend H. B. Munroe, and James Blish, who as a teenager corresponded briefly with Lovecraft. Again, these vary in depth with the substance of the relationship. Citations are given for memoirs of Lovecraft and biographical studies of the individual. The biographical entries are authoritative for the Lovecraft circle but somewhat thin for other figures.

There are main entries for selected subjects from Amateur Journalism to Poetry to World War I. There is a very good index of names, essential to the proper function of a work like this.

Joshi and Schultz note, "Only brief critical commentary is supplied, since we feel it is not our place to enforce our own judgments or evaluations upon readers." This is more than somewhat disingenuous, since the decision of what to include in a synopsis, and how it is phrased, necessarily reveals the compilers' views and predilections.

An *H. P. Lovecraft Encyclopedia* is an invaluable introductory work, a succinct ready reference to the stories and many of the persons who figured in Lovecraft's life. This is coupled with an extremely useful thematic grouping of citations to critical literature—the most useful feature of the book. The *Encyclopedia* should be in every college library and in high school libraries, too, where it may serve to unleash a whole new generation of Lovecraftians upon the world—as future scholars instead of mere scribbles of pastiches and slavish imitations. (As an impartial arbiter, too, it will become a standard part of the bartender's kit in every lodge of the Esoteric Order of Dagon, etc., etc.)

Returning, however, to the benchmarks described earlier—

Revolutionary, Imperial, and Opening the Labyrinth—a careful reading shows that this *Encyclopedia* falls somewhat short: the colorless writing style and its prim course, the ostensibly high-minded evasion of controversy, are sharply at odds with the work's subject matter. Joshi and Schultz chart no new terrain for scholarship and offer only the briefest recapitulations of earlier critical insights, while the plot summaries occupy a substantial portion of each entry and the thematic elements are sometimes repeated in separate entries on principal characters in the stories. Far more problematic are the curious imbalances in the type of information the work contains. What, for example, is gained by the inclusion of a two-line entry on "Jack," the narrator of a ghostwritten story, "The Man of Stone," when the editorial omission of entries for "real persons" reduces Cotton Mather to four largely redundant passing citations? Similar examples of such a skewed measure of relevance abound.

Turning now to *Lovecraft's Library*, the library catalogue has an entirely different history as a genre and demands a different set of measures. To attempt to understand the mind of the writer through the books on the shelves is as old as Montaigne's marginalia and no doubt much older; it is also, instinctively and spontaneously, one of the first things anyone does in entering a room of books. There are lists of books compiled by living authors, the auction catalogues when their libraries are sold (before or after death), and variations on these forms. Swift's own lists and library catalogue have fascinated scholars for decades and are the subject of a new massive four-volume compendium; in more recent times, the Peter Hopkirk sale (Sotheby's, 1998) of central Asian travel literature was the reference library that the author of *Quest for Kim*, *The Great Game*, etc., had collected when no one else was interested in such books. The list of lists is nearly infinite: Johnson, Dickens, Moskowitz. . . .

Lovecraft's Library is an expanded revision of the 1980 compilation by Joshi and Marc Michaud. Michaud was founder of the Necronomicon Press, where the first seeds of Lovecraft studies were sown; the press seems to have fallen dormant after a late, excellent crop: Joshi's exhaustive *Life* (1996) and the collection *Mosk at Last* (1997), gathering Dirk W. Mosk's pioneering and still-compelling essays.

Even though the mainstreaming of Lovecraft proceeds apace, the grassroots activity is greener than you know. Hippocampus Press publisher Derrick Hussey seems to have stepped in to fill the small void created by Michaud's inactivity. The improved production values and general legibility of the new edition of *Lovecraft's Library* (hereafter *LL*) reflect a different, post-mimeograph aesthetic as well as advances in publishing technology.

The first edition of *LL* (including the fugitive Addendum #2) listed about 930 items, mainly from a handwritten inventory of books prepared after Lovecraft's death, with the briefest of annotations (principally citations to the Letters or collections of stories). The new edition has added more than 50 new titles and the annotations are more substantial, identifying the basis for inclusion (the Mary Spink inventory list, those prepared by Lovecraft and his literary executor Robert Barlow, a few booksellers' catalogues). For inscribed copies or books bearing Lovecraft's ownership marks, Joshi indicates when the book survives and has been examined by him.

LL's interest for a variety of reasons and in different ways. What reader could fail to be moved by *LL* 443, *A Magician Among the Spirits* (1924), inscribed by the author: "To my friend Howard Lovecraft, Best Wishes, Houdini, 'My brain is the key that sets me free.'"

To leaf through the book is to find that Lovecraft's fascination with the eighteenth century was indeed rooted in family copies of books from that period, both major and minor. There are turgid volumes of miscellaneous verse and books of rhetoric at every turn. So, too, there are enough astronomy books to see how the youthful Lovecraft turned his gaze to the stars. From an antiquarian perspective, the single most valuable book in his library was certainly *LL* 598, a first edition of Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*, or *The Ecclesiastical History of New-England* . . . (London, 1702), "the most famous American book of colonial times and the indispensable source for colonial social history" (Streeter 658).

But Lovecraft read all manner of literature, from Walter Scott to Frederick Rolfe to *LL* 954, the Modern Library *Fairy Tales and Poems in Prose* of Oscar Wilde (1918). Joshi notes that Colin Wilson considered "The Birthday of the Infanta" to be an influence of "The Outsider" (composed in the summer of 1921). From his satire of T. S. Eliot, "Waste Paper: A Poem of Profound Insignificance," it is evident that Lovecraft read "The Waste Land" in *The Dial* for November 1922, which figures as *LL* 238. (Lord Alfred Douglas, on the other hand, despised "that impudent jackass" sufficiently to scrawl his verdict in a copy of Eliot's *Collected Poems*.) The range of Lovecraft's reading of contemporary and near contemporary anthologies and short story collections is impressive and fully documented here.

Lovecraft's library was his gateway to the infinite universe. In terms of usefulness, importance of content, and concision of relevant detail, *LL* is a successful reference book, improved in this new edition.

Of all the millions of words Joshi has published about Lovecraft, the single most interesting passage for this reader remains the annotation of *LL* 400, *The Lock and Key Library: Classic Mystery and Detective Stories* (1909), a ten-volume anthology edited by Julian Hawthorne (son of Nathaniel Hawthorne). The books are small drab things, easily overlooked on the shelves of a used book store or library book sale (where they are usually encountered lacking one or more volumes), but the contents are not to be dismissed.

Joshi's annotation to *The Lock and Key Library* cites the specific stories in these books that figure in Lovecraft's essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, first published in *LL* 723, *The Recluse* (1927). In essence a roadmap of the essay, *LL* 400 sheds light on the essay's strengths and clarifies its sometimes curious omissions. It is no exaggeration to say that Lovecraft essentially defined a new genre and a new way of looking at literature through his careful selection from these volumes. Until that act, the stories were viewed as a subset of the mystery field; but to paraphrase Borges in "Kafka and His Predecessors," it is no longer possible to do so. Lovecraft was not the first nor the only critic to point to supernatural aspects of literature, but the impact of Dorothy Scarborough's *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* (1917) is minuscule—within the genre or without—in comparison to that of Lovecraft's book. *LL* 400 is where it started.

Joshi also cites the relevant portions of Lovecraft's correspondence to demonstrate that Charles Brockden Brown's American Gothic, *Wieland; or the Transformation* (1798), was known only from the excerpt "Wieland's Madness" in this anthology. Sometimes the Recluse of Providence just couldn't be bothered to track down the original or complete text.

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So, two reference works on Lovecraft, the *Encyclopedia* nearly essential, if flawed; and *Lovecraft's Library* indispensable and of even greater interest. And today, in the earliest days of 2004, those milestones of canonical acceptance—*The Norton Critical Edition of H. P. Lovecraft: The Cambridge Lovecraft*—to which I alluded in just in

these pages (in a review of the Joyce Carol Oates *Lovecraft* in 1997) no longer seem so distant. ►

Henry Wadsworth, author of *Another Green World* (*Temporary Culture*, 2003), lives and reads in Montclair, New Jersey.

The Complete Tolkien Companion by J. E. A. Tyler

New York: Thomas Dunne/St. Martin's Press, 2004; \$2.95 hc; 715 pages

reviewed by Jenny Blackford

I don't know how the NYRSE editors knew about my secret vice. I didn't think it was so obvious. However, I knew the secret was out when *The Complete Tolkien Companion* recently arrived in my letterbox. I might as well confess: As a teenager, I was so immersed in Tolkien that I wrote letters to my friends in Elvish script. I still have a little Elvish wall-hanging, hand-embroidered by a friend for my birthday. I've even got the rare old LP record of Tolkien singing his own songs. Middle-earth was much more real to me than the horrors of outer-suburban high school.

The Complete Tolkien Companion is a book for people like me—the sort of people who get a shiver up their spine at the sound of the words “the Witch-king of Angmar.” Others should simply not bother; they will surely find it tedious.

The Complete Tolkien Companion makes no compromises towards the wonderful movies. They are simply not mentioned; their peculiar distortions of the story (relatively few, considering Hollywood's track record) are ignored. The *Companion* is a companion to Tolkien's books, not to the movies. This may harm its sales, but it makes it far more valuable to people genuinely interested in the books.

This is the third version of the work. The first was *The Tolkien Companion*, published in 1976, and quickly superseded by the posthumous publication of Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, which contains an extraordinary wealth of data about Tolkien's universe, written in a strange variety of styles, often quite archaic. With no other major dunes, I managed for the first time to work my way through the entirety of this unreadable but fascinating book soon after watching the first movie, when my hunger for Tolkien was not sated by re-reading *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. I can see how much its publication back in the 1970s must have dismayed and thrilled an author who thought he had produced a full *Companion* to Tolkien.

The New Tolkien Companion, incorporating information from *The Silmarillion*, was published in 1979. This new version, *The Complete Tolkien Companion*, heroically incorporates information from the scholarly to-the-volume History of Middle-earth series, and *Unfinished Tales*, all edited by Christopher Tolkien from his father's papers. It does not attempt to compete with them in any way; it is a companion for aficionados, not a scholarly source.

The book contains entries on all sorts of entities and events in Tolkien's works. I've spent hours browsing in it, since it arrived, moving from entry to entry, searching for details I've always wondered about, or just following random lines. Each time, I had just planned a quick look.

I find it irresistible.

The Complete Tolkien Companion concentrates on providing reference material and background information on a vast range of things, useful for people who have read at least *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* and preferably *The Silmarillion*. I can't imagine the *Companion* being much use to people who have only seen the movies. It seldom gives simple summary information about events or entities clearly described in *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, or even *The Silmarillion*. For example, in the Smaugol-Gollum entry, the author states explicitly that he does not propose to describe Gollum's role in the action of Tolkien's popular novels:

The tale of Gollum's long and terrible odyssey has been recounted at length in the Red Book—in both of the major sections of narrative, for both Bilbo and Frodo Baggins encountered him during their adventures. This entry will accordingly confine itself to recording those details of Gollum's ancestry which lie outside the main tale.

Moreover, the book's definitions assume considerable knowledge on the part of the reader. The definition of Middle-earth, for example, is (in full):

A translation of both *Endoré* (Q.) and *Ennor*, *Ennorath* (Sind.). In all records of the Third Age, this expression means “Mortal Lands,” i.e. all the land East of the Sundering Seas and subject to natural laws.

This is not what someone who has only seen the films, and is wondering about “Middle-earth,” would need to be told. They would need something more like, “The world of *The Lord of the Rings*, inhabited by Elves, Hobbits, Dwarves and Orcs, as well as Men. Countries include Gondor, Rohan and The Shire (Frodo's home).”

The information in the Middle-earth entry is clearly designed for people sharing Tolkien's interest in imaginary languages (to the Tolkien addict, it is obvious that “Q.” and “Sind.” in the entry are Quenya and Sindarin, the two most important Elvish languages) and imaginary history/mythology/religion (we remember that immortal lands, where natural laws do not apply, do exist, west across the Sundering Seas). There is no entry for “Sundering Seas.” The reader is expected to remember what they are—as all good Tolkien addicts would. Nonetheless, it would have been nice if this had been cross-referenced.

For people like me, there are real treasures, even if finding them is not always easy. I was thrilled to find, tracking from the Balin entry, that the Balinogs were originally Maiar—and so were the Wizards. This means that the fight between Gandalf and the Balinog in Moria was an even match. It wasn't so easy to track down exactly what “Maiar” means. The Maiar entry starts, “The people of the Valar, likewise of the race of the AINUR but of lesser rank, and in greater number.” It doesn't get any simpler as it goes on. What it means, I eventually untangled, is that the Maiar are the less important and noble of the Ainur (Spirits) whom Ilúvatar (God) created before the Creation of Arda (the World), and who helped in the creation. The more important and noble of the Spirits are the Valar, who are more or less Gods and Goddesses. And, to go on quibbling, it would have been helpful if the Valar entry included a list of the known names of the Valar, as the Maiar entry includes the names of the Maiar; and, once again, it would have been helpful if the list in the Maiar entry stated that *Carrivir* is Saruman, as it states that *Olórin* is Gandalf.

The author no longer pretends in the Introduction that the source material is “real,” as he did in *The Tolkien Companion*, the 1976 version of the book, but the entries do still assume it. This seems quite reasonable; it would be cumbersome to do otherwise. Where an entry's source is written in somewhat archaic English, the entry is, too (as, for example, the Maiar entry quoted above). I found this more charming than irritating, but if one were trying to use the book for scholarly purposes, rather than pure pleasure, I suspect it could become tedious.

My knowledge of Tolkien is not so encyclopedic that I would be confident of spotting any but the most egregious error, but—for what it is worth—I didn't find anything that seemed dodgy. I don't agree with Tyler's feeling that “Morgul” is a name of the chief Ringwraith, the Witch-king of Angmar, but Tyler gives this as a hypothesis, not as a fact.

This book is a labor of love, meant for other lovers. It is a *Companion*, not an *Encyclopedia*. It will delight those for whom it is written. ►

Jenny Blackford lives in Melbourne, Australia.

A World without Winter Is No Improvement

It is New Year's weekend as I write and therefore only technically a couple of weeks into winter. It has been a mild weekend but a cold and stormy season since early December. And the next time I write an editorial it will be nearly spring. I anticipate missing much of the worst winter weather because of weeks spent in Australia, and then Seattle, and I am glad. The seas may be rising and the summers may be a degree or two hotter, but the real effect of global warming on me so far has been storms: snowstorms, thunderstorms, and hurricanes. Turbulent weather is noticeably on the increase in my neighborhood. I rather like exciting weather, but it is destructive and costly and time-consuming. I have a feeling we are all going to like this aspect of the twenty-first century less and less as the years go by. It is probably time to visit Venice. It may not be there when you are older.

As the year begins, I wonder about the future of science fiction. There has been a lot of talk about the missing "middle future" in contemporary sf in the last year. There's a lot of sf set in the very near future, and a lot set in the relatively or very distant future, but extremely little of the classic hundred-years-hence fiction (okay, sometimes it was fifty years, or five hundred, but you recognize the mode, from *Looking Backward* to 1984 to *The Dispossessed* to *The Handmaid's Tale* to *Islands in the Net*). And it is that segment of sf that most characteristically deals with politics, political satire, political speculation, utopian thinking, and dystopian warnings. It is curious that in a time when political valence is so overt in so much sf, political speculation is so comparatively scarce.

Some people say that it is the deadening effect on near-future sf of Vernor Vinge's speculation about The Singularity that, if accurate, renders the future unknowable past fifty years hence and removes the grounds for speculation beyond the end of history and the beginning of the posthuman future. I think it is the deadening effect of the politicization of science and technology in the real world. For many of the emerging technologies of the present, there are political positions already attached, pro and con. This is a new thing in recent years in the US, if not in Europe, where technological pessimism is historically stronger.

My own feeling is that we need a lot more carefully crafted, humane—and even literary—positive speculation about possible good scientific and technological outcomes in sf, in the face of the dire politics of the right and the left at present. And indeed in opposition to the realistically nasty things that seem to be facing the human race in the next hundred years and more. Or perhaps we just need more and more visionary writers, more sf. And certainly more technological optimists. ▶

—David G. Hartwell
& the editors

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